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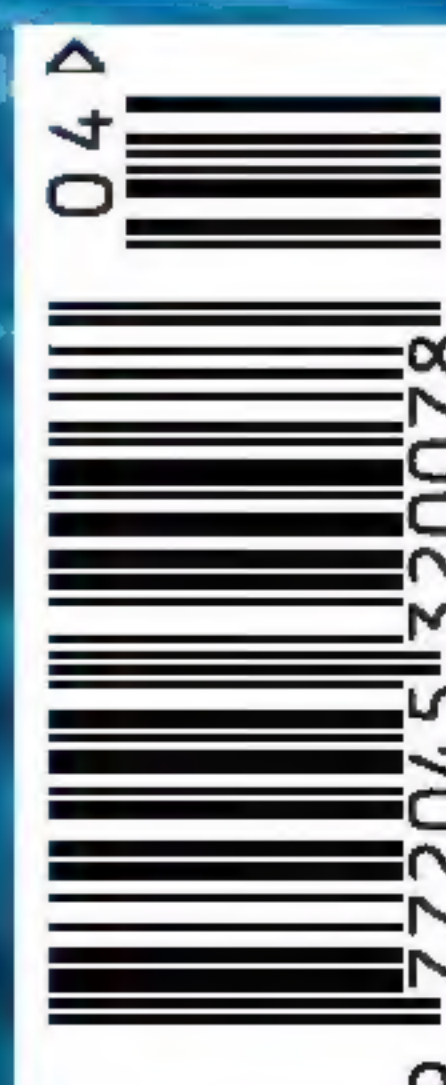
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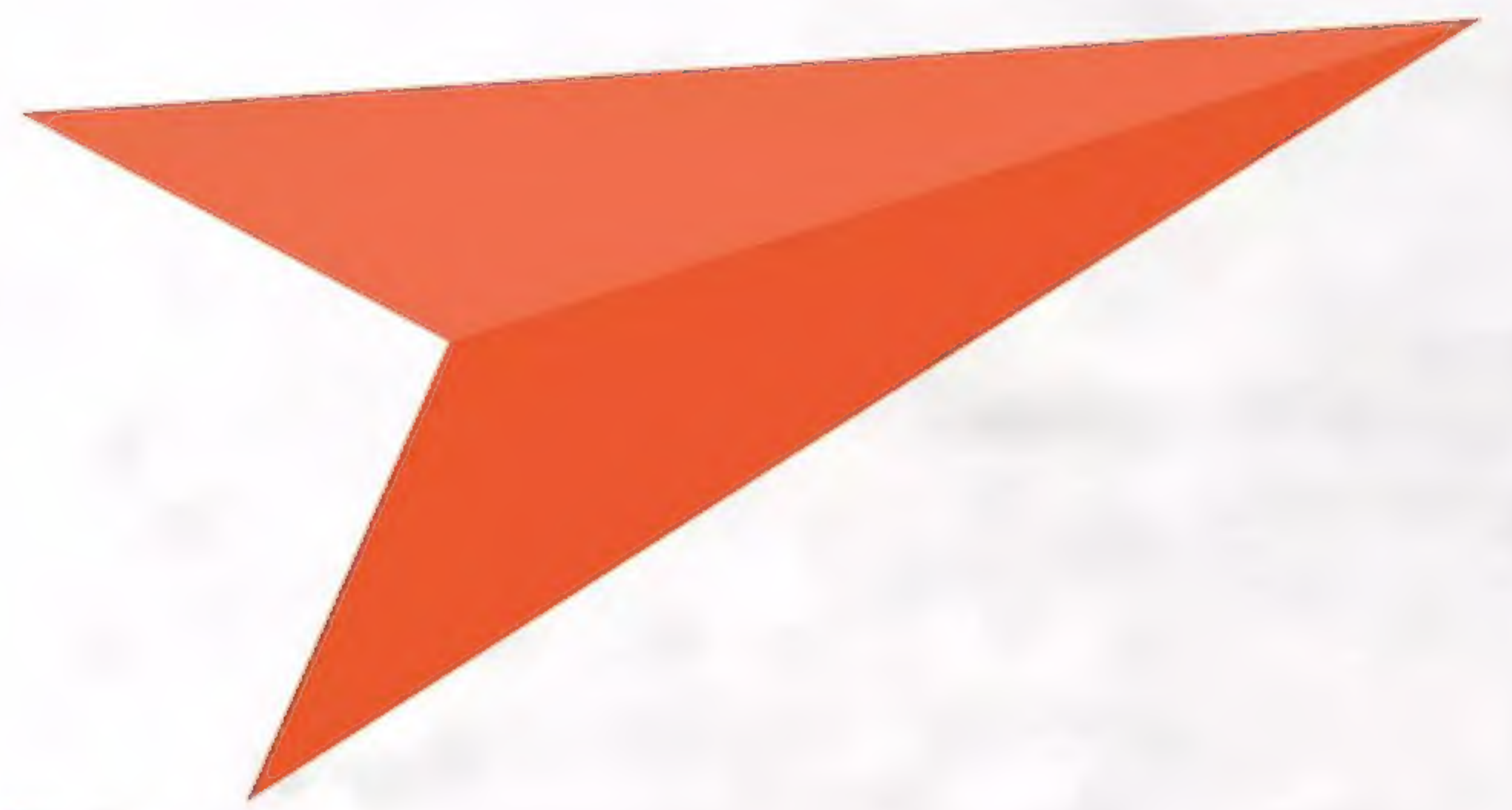
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The colourful harbour in Symi, Dodecanese Islands, Greece  
Image: AWL Images

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# CONTRIBUTORS



## Sarah Reid

I travelled to Kosovo seeking adventure and I certainly found it – from gnarly via ferrata routes to cave systems tucked behind thundering waterfalls, and some beautiful alpine hiking, too. **SOUTHERN KOSOVO P.44**



## Stuart Forster

Findlay Market is a great entry point for delving into Cincinnati's historical Over-The-Rhine district, where 19th-century German settlers left grand, pastel-shaded buildings and excavated labyrinthine beer cellars far below the surface. **CINCINNATI P.50**



## Monisha Rajesh

Taking a sleeper train through Norway beneath the miraculous midnight sun is a once-in-a-lifetime indulgence. It's a time to readjust your body clock, sip coffee into the small hours and watch from a dining car window as the fjords glide past. **NORWAY P.110**



## Matt Dutile

While I was travelling in eastern Bhutan, I was struck by the warmth of the people I met – from the *kishuthara* weavers of Khoma to semi-nomadic yak herders in Merak and Sakteng, for whom life has remained virtually unchanged for centuries. **BHUTAN P.124**



## Ellen Himelfarb

São Paulo is a product of its people. The Indigenous art, the market hustlers, the samba-infused hip-hop, the cheese bun and sweet coffee you get at every breakfast joint – they all form an amazing snapshot of contemporary life in Brazil. **SÃO PAULO P.150**



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### Headquarters

1145 17th St. NW, Washington, DC 20036-4688, USA

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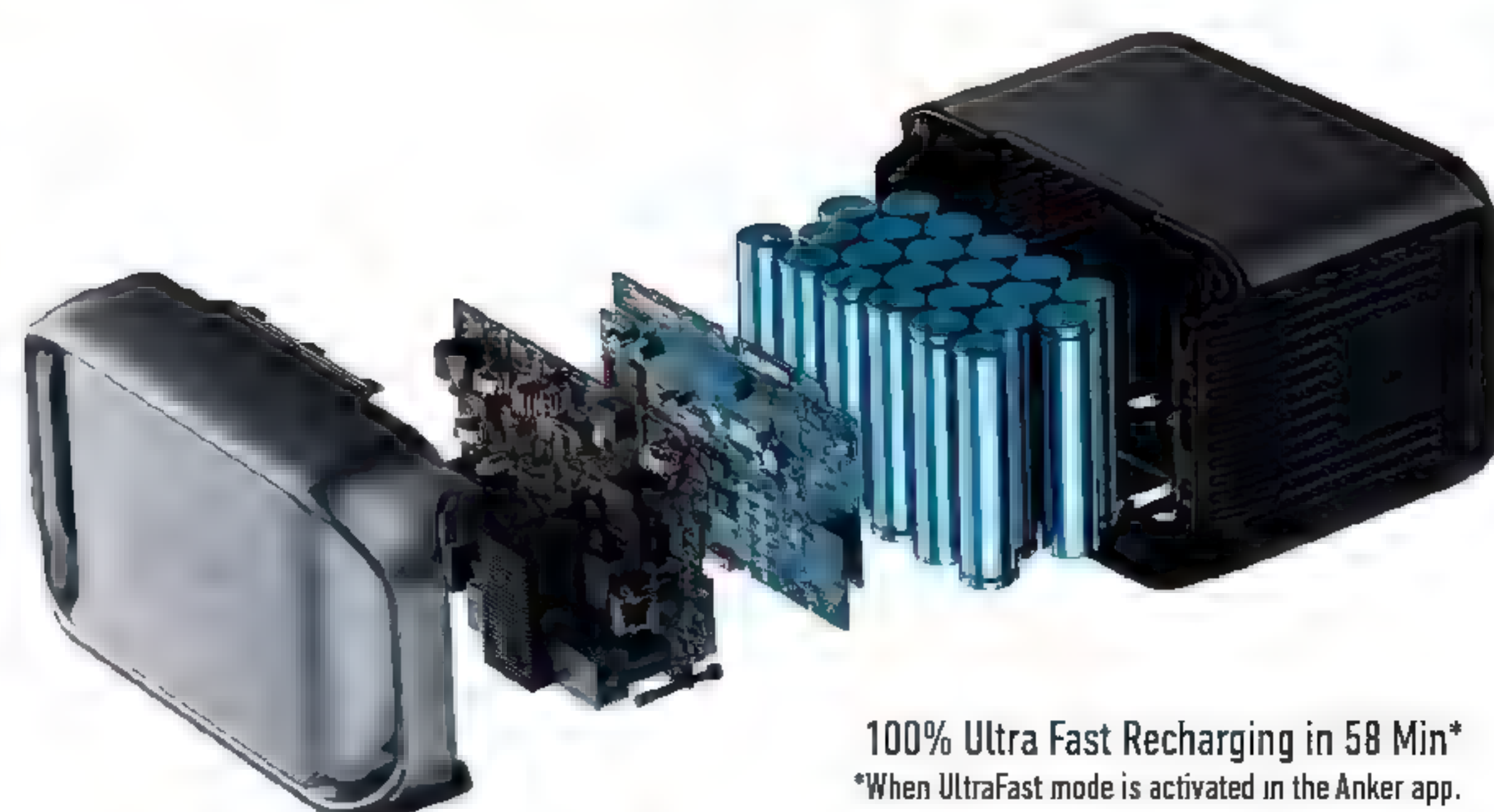
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# Editor's letter

ISSUE 121, APRIL 2024



The Greek islands are so familiar to most that the mere mention of the Aegean Sea jolts the memory and senses, instantly bringing the smell of jasmine or pine and the sight of a whitewashed village to mind.

With their ubiquitous olive groves, sandy coves and azure waters, it's easy to forget how distinct each Greek island is. Each one's history and culture reflects the shifting sands of the centuries before modern Greece's existence — the Venetians, Ottomans and Knights of St John, among others, who have shaped these Mediterranean outposts.

But of the 227 inhabited islands and the thousands spread across the six main groups, how many do you really know? Corfu, Rhodes and Santorini maybe, but Syros, Lemnos and Milos? How about Skopelos, Poros and Lefkada?

This issue we celebrate the Greek islands you know, and those you possibly don't, as well as the myriad experiences they offer — from experiencing ghost towns, Easter festivals and active volcanoes to an ouzo museum, shipwreck dives and a dune-filled desert. You'll soon be making plans to spend lazy days on boats around Paxos, take slightly more strenuous hikes around Symi, discover the mountainous car-free island of Hydra or simply indulge in the wines and gourmet offerings in Tinos.

And maybe there's time for one of those soft, white sandy beaches, too?

**Pat Riddell, editor**



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### Best of the World

National Geographic's annual guide of the year's most exciting and meaningful travel experiences, from bear-watching in Alaska to hiking Panama's El Valle de Antón volcano. [natgeo.com/bestoftheworld](https://natgeo.com/bestoftheworld)

Above: Hiking Panama's Ruta de la Caldera, a system of trails around an extinct volcano, leads to views like this one from Cerro Cara Iguana



### Food Festival 2024

Book now for the National Geographic Traveller (UK) Food Festival and hone your palate with all-new tasting sessions, hands-on workshops and a line-up of Main Stage headliners including Nadiya Hussain. **P.190**

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# SMART TRAVELLER

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## MAATHEE

Chen Jinshui, Ansheng, China

Maathee is a traditional Chinese art form that involves creating intricate patterns in the air using a long, thin, white rope. Chen Jinshui, a master of this art form, is shown in the image performing Maathee. He is wearing a dark jacket and a white apron, and is holding a long, thin, white rope that he is swinging in a circular motion. The background is dark, and the rope is illuminated, creating a dramatic effect. The text on the left side of the image describes the art form and mentions that Chen Jinshui is a master of this art form. It also mentions that he is performing Maathee in Ansheng, China.

ZHONGHUA YANB + PHOTOGRAPHER



1 111 111

Winner of the Harben Award for  
Best in Art in the category of Pink Lady® Food  
Photography for the Year 2023










#### **HERONS**

##### **Acapulco, Mexico**

Herons and fisherman at the titled *Circle of Life* was a strong appeal to the public on Mexico's Pacific Coast. I have been visiting the lagoon's landscapes, taking pictures from the shore, and now the passion has increased that I should be involved in the beauty of the herons that live on these waters. I now shoot at water level, which gives the impression of being immersed. My routine starts before dawn, to capture the arrival of the fishermen after a night on the lagoon. The herons welcome them, looking for their first meal of the day. Titled *Circle of Life*, this image captures the energy of this daily ritual.

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*Circle of Life* took second place in the Nature/Animals/Pets, Professional category of the 2023 International Photography Awards. [photoawards.com](https://photoawards.com)





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"No matter where you find yourself, you're always truly, and deep down inside, a foreigner," says Adriano Pedrosa, artistic director of the São Paulo Museum of Art and curator of this year's Venice Biennale — the show's first from the Southern Hemisphere. Held every two years, the six-month festival champions the world's greatest artistic talent through exhibitions and national pavilions. For its 60th edition, opening on 20 April this year, Pedrosa has chosen the title *Stranieri Ovunque* — 'Foreigners Everywhere' — and favoured

artists that have had no or little involvement in the Biennale before. Taking place in Venice's Giardini parkland and Arsenale shipyard areas, the expo will be formed of two parts: the Nucleo Contemporaneo, focusing on marginalised groups such as Indigenous, queer and outsider artists, and the Nucleo Storico, which will showcase 20th-century works from Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia, as well as the Italian artistic diaspora. 20 April-24 November, 2024 [labiennale.org](http://labiennale.org)  
**LISELI THOMAS**

Above from left: Indian artist Madhvi Parekh with a piece from the Cosmic Garden showcase; Building Bridges sculpture by artist Lorenzo Quinn, in the basin of Venice's Arsenale

## WHAT TO SEE

### 1 EXILE IS A HARD JOB

Turkish feminist artist Nil Yalter, one of two winners of this year's Golden Lion award for lifetime achievement, will present a new version of her ongoing project, *Exile is a Hard Job*, which started in 1975. The installation tackles the issue of social ostracisation afflicting those living in foreign lands, through the medium of photos and drawings. It will be the first time the octogenarian has ever shown work at the Biennale, and it'll be displayed in the Central Pavilion at the Giardini.

### 2 COSMIC GARDEN

Indian artists Madhvi and Manu Parekh have collaborated with Mumbai's Chanakya School of Craft, which focuses on empowering women, for this showcase at Venice's Salone Verde. Paintings and sculptures inspired by Indian culture will be centred around expressionism, modernism and female deities, and will be presented along with reimaginings of the works as hand-embroidered pieces. Some 320 female artisans have been involved in handcrafting the works, which use organic materials such as silk.

### 3 KA'A PŪERA: WE ARE WALKING BIRDS

The Brazil Pavilion will be renamed the Hãhãwpuá Pavilion this year, for a takeover by Glicéria Tupinambá — an artist, activist and representative of the Tupinambá Indigenous community of Serra do Padeiro and Olivença, from Southern Bahia — along with two other Indigenous artists, Olinda Tupinambá and Ziel Karapotó. Hãhãwpuá is an Indigenous name for the lands that became Brazil, and the exhibition will confront the marginalisation of Brazil's Indigenous communities since colonisation.



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WHAT'S NEW

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## Vine excursions

Minerva Wines was born in 2015 after local farmer Emma Rice was inspired by a trip to Beaune — which lies at the centre of Burgundy's winemaking region — to plant some 10,000 vines at Corston Fields Farm in Somerset. A grape's toss from Bath's Georgian crescents and Roman pools, the vineyard is launching new experiences this April: visitors are invited to join supper clubs, partake in vine-side tastings of sparkling vintages and venture out on grape-picking excursions. It's even possible to spend the night in one of the winery's shepherd's huts, which look out over rows of vines. [minervawine.com](http://minervawine.com)

## Wine & dine

The barley fields that blanket Norfolk have made the county a centre for beer and brewing, but it's the region's burgeoning wine industry that's stealing the limelight this summer. Norwich Wine Week will see the medieval city host some of the region's most important wine producers, including Flint, Burn Valley and Chet Valley vineyards. Events kick off on 14 June, ushering in a three-day festival that'll showcase Norfolk's food and music as well as its viticulture. Expect talks and tastings in award-winning restaurants and historical buildings throughout the city. [norwichwineweek.co.uk](http://norwichwineweek.co.uk)

## New vintage

Since 2015, Taittinger — the renowned French winemaking family and producers of Champagne — has been quietly planting Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier vines on the sunny, south-facing slopes around Selling Court Farm in Kent. The result is Domaine Evremond, the first UK vineyard established by a Grande Marque Champagne — one of France's 24 'big-brand' Champagne houses. The vineyard's first batch of premium English sparkling wine will be available to try from September, after three years of ageing in the bottle, while a winery and visitor centre are set to open towards the end of 2024, with views out over the estate. [domaineevremond.com](http://domaineevremond.com) **SAM KEMP**

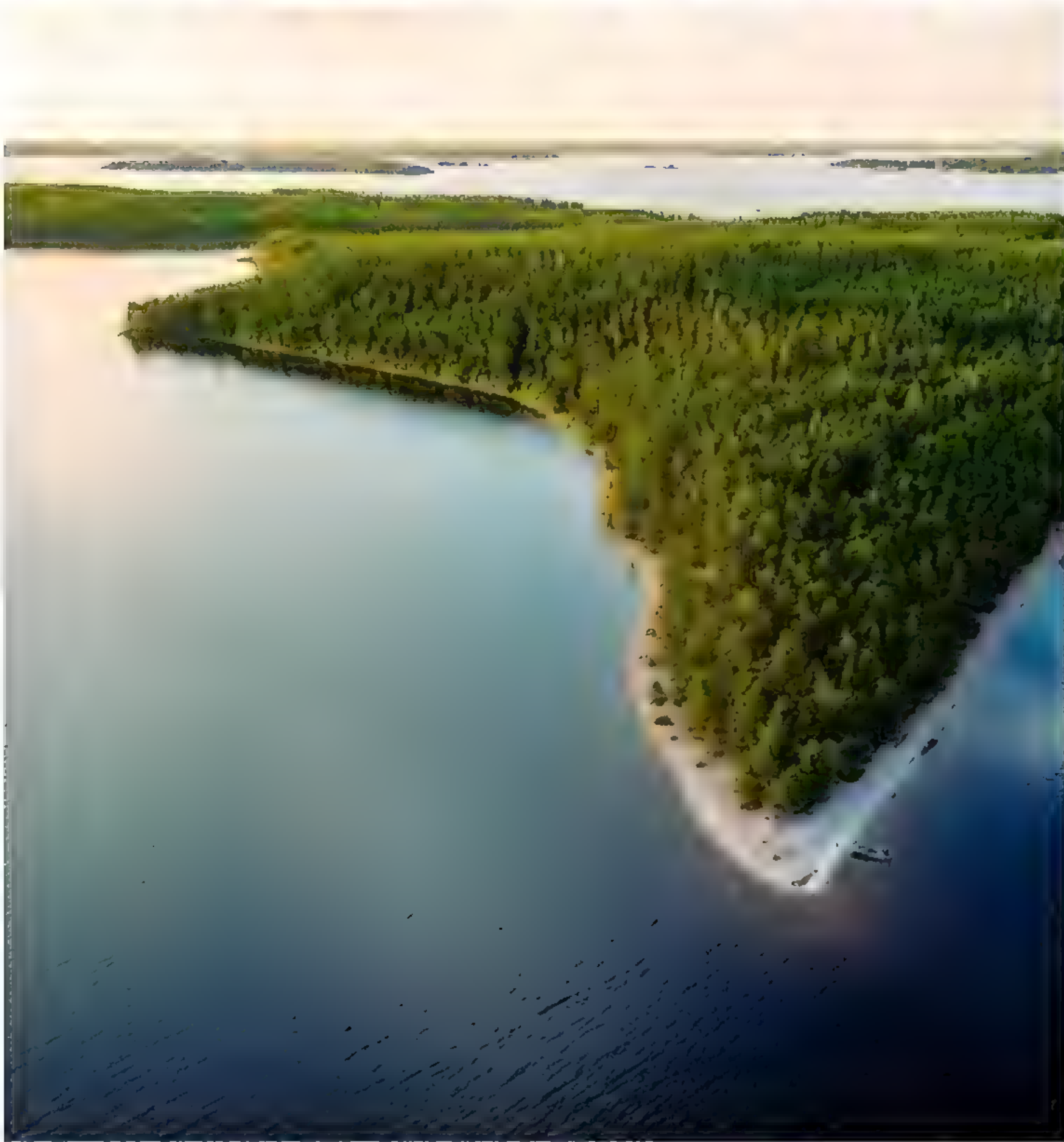


Domaine Evremond, a winery established by Taittinger in Kent. Below: Norfolk's streets will play host to local winemakers this June





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## MUST-TRY DISHES

### TAPENADE

Made by pounding together olives, garlic, anchovies, capers and olive oil until smooth, briny tapenade is often found on the table during *apéro* (pre-dinner drinks and snacks). Spread it on a slice of baguette or serve it alongside a mix of crudités.

### PISSALADIÈRE

Slices of *pissaladière* can be found at bakeries, markets and restaurants — or easily made at home. Pile the tart's base, either a yeasted dough or crisp puff pastry, with caramelised onions before decorating with oily anchovies and cured black olives.

### RATATOUILLE

This dish combines the best of the Provençal summer garden: aubergines, peppers, tomatoes, courgettes and onions. Traditionally, each vegetable is cooked separately in olive oil until tender, then folded together in the pot.

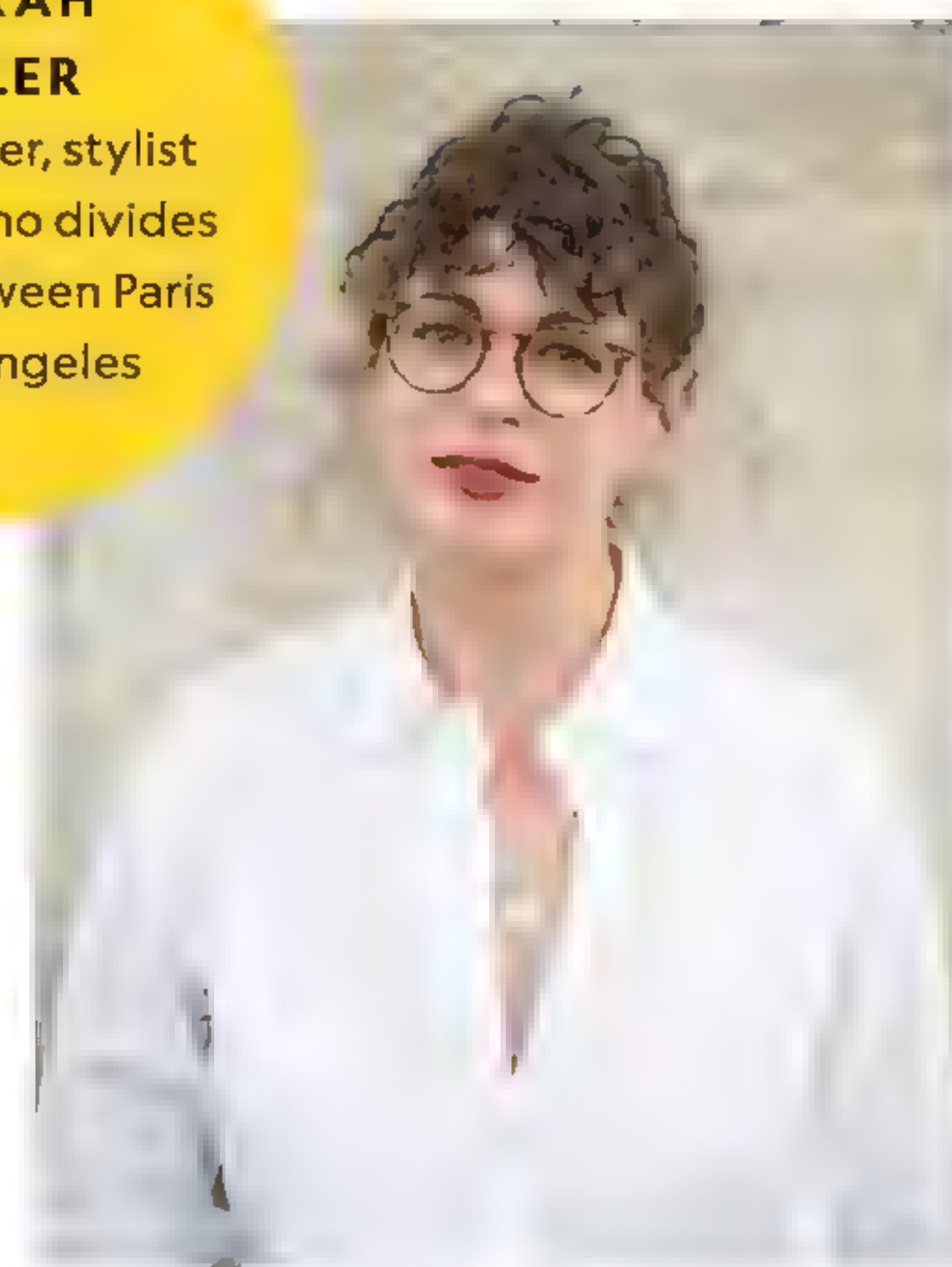
## Essential ingredient

Olive oil is essential to the Provençal pantry. Ranging from mild and sweet to bold and spicy, it's used to cook, preserve, make sauces and vinaigrettes, and to drizzle over dishes

Left: Pissaladière tart with caramelised onions and anchovies

### REBEKAH PEPPLER

is a food writer, stylist and author who divides her time between Paris and Los Angeles



A TASTE OF

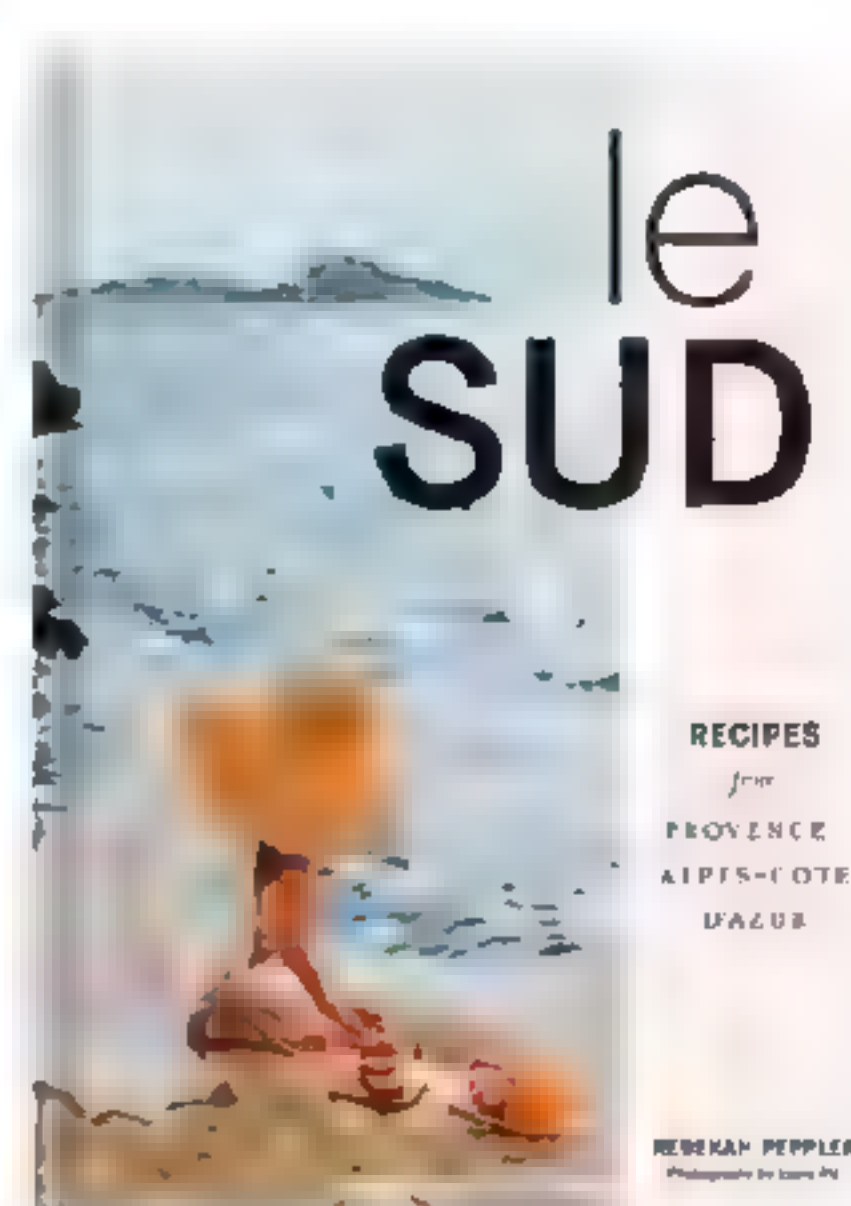
# The South of France

SUN-RIPENED PRODUCE, FROM AUBERGINES TO OLIVES, TAKES CENTRE STAGE IN PROVENCE-ALPES-CÔTE D'AZUR

All the clichés about the south of France are true. The light takes on new forms by the hour, adding beauty to the simplest pleasures. There are open-air markets selling sun-ripened produce, and there's the surprisingly loud, surprisingly comforting sound of cicadas in late summer. Olive trees, lavender and sunflowers spread for acres, and cliffs drop into turquoise coves. And the food? It meets all expectations, from figs and Provençal melons to crispy *panisse* (chickpea flour fries) and rotisserie chicken. Plus, of course, the overwhelming variety of local cheeses and fresh seafood from the rivers and coasts.

The southeastern region known as Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur is also where the French go on holiday — and where throngs of Europeans descend for summer *vacances*, doing their best French impression.

While visitors may picture it as a uniform fantasy land, it's actually a place of wonderful variety. It's bounded in the north by the snow-capped Southern Alps and in the south by



the French Mediterranean. The Italian border marks the east; the Rhône river makes up its western edge. Within its borders are pine forests, rivers and the Camargue plains and marshes where you'll find prized produce such as nutty, aromatic Camargue red rice and *fleur de sel*, a finishing salt.

The region's food culture reflects and draws directly from these landscapes,

and it's made first and foremost at home. Translating the region's terroir onto the plate, local flavours are vivid, fresh and largely unadorned, veering away from technique-heavy dishes associated with French haute cuisine. And while there are countless Provençal dishes that serve to exemplify this particular magic, tapenade (a spread of olives, capers and anchovies), *pissaladière* (a tart with savoury toppings) and ratatouille are an excellent starting point.

Adapted from *Le Sud: Recipes from Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur*, by Rebekah Pepler.

Published by Chronicle Books (£26)



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ON THE TRAIL

# BRISTOL

Take a tour of the West Country city's finest music venues, from the new Beacon to one in a former church

## 1 WANTED RECORDS

Start the day at St Nicholas Market, Bristol's oldest, held in a cathedral-like structure that's been a place to trade, snack and shop in since 1743. In the heart of the Old City, surrounded by handsome Georgian buildings and indie boutiques, the market is a must for vinyl vultures. Wanted Records buys and sells jazz, reggae, psychedelic and progressive rock, hip-hop, folk and myriad sub-genres, including collectible items. [wantedrecords.co.uk](http://wantedrecords.co.uk)

## 2 ST GEORGE'S BRISTOL

Head to church — a former one that functions as a top venue for classical, jazz and folk music. An extension to the Greek Revival building in 2018 added a pavilion for art exhibitions and performances, plus a cafe-bar whose leafy courtyard is a great pit-stop for coffee, cake or toasties after a stroll around nearby Brandon Hill. Look out for regular lunchtime concerts and 'mini beats' sessions for kids. [stgeorgesbristol.co.uk](http://stgeorgesbristol.co.uk)

3

STOKES CROFT

4

STRANGE BREW

## 5 BRISTOL BEACON

Hosting club nights, gigs and concerts, Bristol's newest venue has completely reimagined the former live music landmark Colston Hall, bringing four new performance spaces to the city. Opening its doors in November 2023, the Beacon bills itself as having some of the best acoustics in Europe. This year, its main stage will host shows by artists including Orbital, Robert Plant and Róisín Murphy. [bristolbeacon.org](http://bristolbeacon.org)

## 6 THEKLA

Dance until near-dawn at this bar, club and gig venue, set aboard a 1950s German cargo ship moored at the Mud Dock. A floating symbol of Bristol's maritime and music heritage, it became a club in the 1990s. Since then, it's supported local drum and bass, techno and breakbeat artists with regular events, while its Saturday indie and alternative Pop Confessional has become a staple of Bristol's late-night scene. [theklabristol.co.uk](http://theklabristol.co.uk) **SARAH BARRELL**

## 3 STOKES CROFT

Explore the city's creative quarter, defined by indie shops and Bristol's highest concentration of street art, including Banksy murals. As well as plant-based dining spots and arty bars, Stokes Croft is also where you'll find landmark music venues such as The Canteen, a restaurant-bar with free gigs most nights, and club stalwart Lakota. That Thing, nearby, sells creative crafts made by 50 Bristol artists. [visitbristol.co.uk](http://visitbristol.co.uk)

## 4 STRANGE BREW

Housed inside a former car showroom, this multi-room arts space is testament to Bristol's flair for small- to medium-size indie venues. It opened in 2020 after a crowdfunding campaign by the promoters behind local club-night institution Dirtytalk, and operates as a music venue, cafe and bar. It's also home to Planet Caravan, which sells vinyl, CDs, music fanzines and original prints by local artists. [strangebrewbristol.com](http://strangebrewbristol.com)





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## Populus

Next to Civic Center Park, Populus is set to open its doors this summer. Its exterior is inspired by the bark of Colorado's native aspen trees, while its 265 rooms are decorated in shades of sand and terracotta. Low-impact materials have been used in construction; the wooden slats on display in the lobby, for instance, are reclaimed fencing. The plan also includes a promise to plant 5,000 acres of trees. From \$299 (£238). [populusdenver.com](https://populusdenver.com)

## The Rally Hotel

This 182-room hotel in the LoDo district hits a home run with its subtle sporty design: the tasteful, museum-worthy displays of signed memorabilia and red-stitch wall accents are a nod to the neighbouring Coors Field baseball stadium. The rooms put a playful twist on the traditional, blending tobacco leathers and woods with pops of purple. From \$299 (£238). [therallyhotel.com](https://therallyhotel.com)

## Limelight Denver

Hotel brand Limelight added this property to its portfolio last summer. Guest rooms, some of which offer views towards the Rockies, are awash with knotty natural woods and leather furniture. The hotel sits beside Union Station, and its restaurant, Citizen Rail, takes its design cues from its neighbour. Coloradan produce and seasonal ingredients feature on the menu. From \$350 (£278). [limelighthotels.com](https://limelighthotels.com) **MARGARET ABIGAIL**

WHERE TO STAY

# Denver

THE GATEWAY TO THE ROCKIES IS REDEFINING ITSELF WITH A RAFT OF INNOVATIVE HOTELS

## Thompson Denver

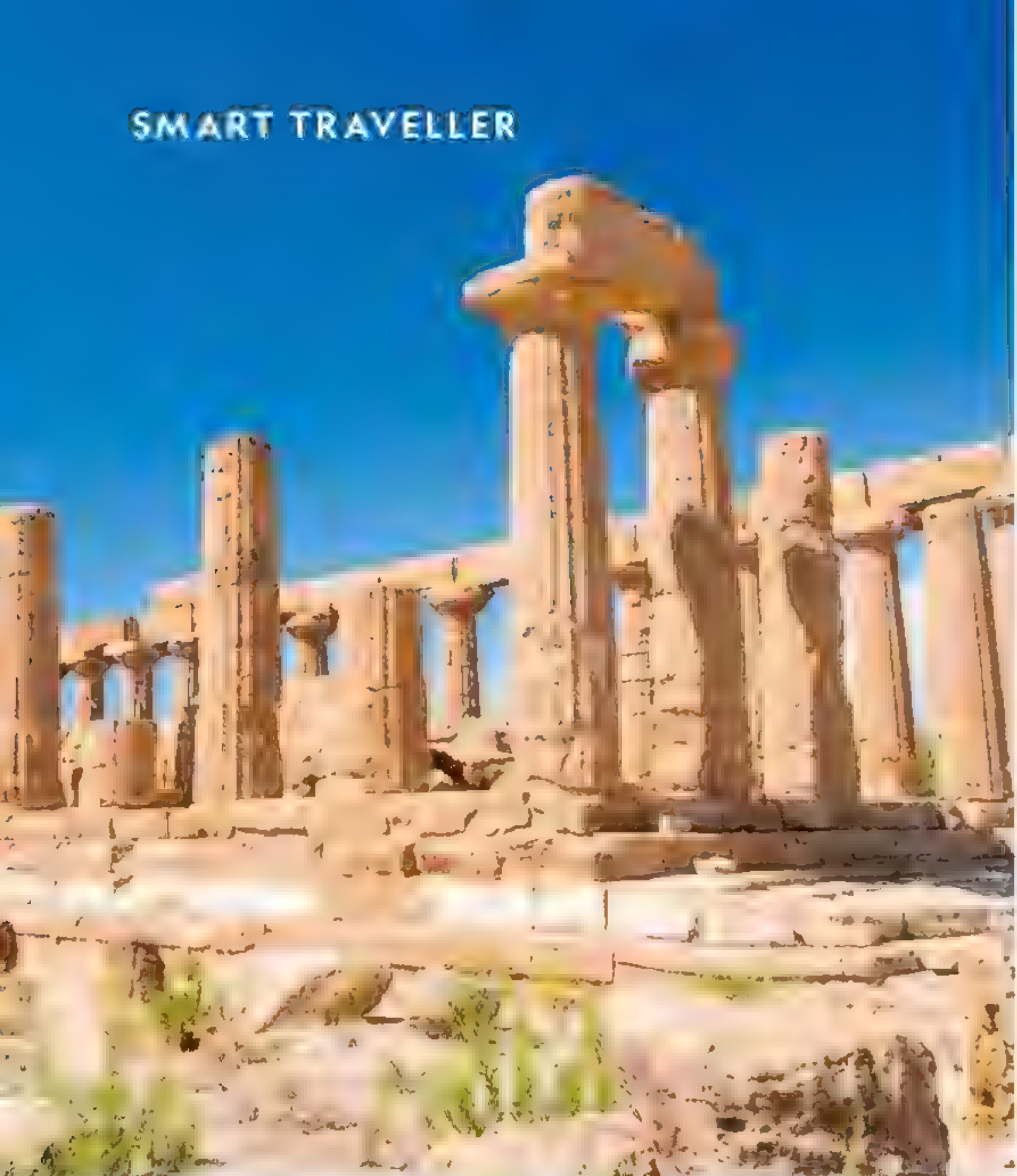
The Mile High City, so named because it stands one mile above sea level, is scaling new heights. Situated where the Great Plains meet the Rocky Mountains, Denver was founded as a gold-mining town in 1858 — a history commemorated by the gold-plated dome of the state capitol. Today, it's known for its gleaming skyscrapers and is one of the fastest-growing cities in the US, with urbanites and travellers alike drawn to its art trails, craft beer and elevated food scene (featuring everything from cheese-filled *khachapuri* bread to beef tacos), plus its boundless opportunities for outdoor pursuits.

Against this backdrop, a number of hotels have recently popped up across the city — and Thompson Denver, in LoDo (Lower Downtown), within walking distance of the Denver Art Museum, Urban Station's upmarket restaurants and the cool Dairy Block district, is one of the most exciting. The interiors marry the city's heritage with the great outdoors, with a palette of browns, deep greens and granite greys. There are also fun touches like saddle-leather headboards in its mid-century-inspired rooms. Since opening in 2022, Chez Maggy, the hotel's French brasserie, has been one of the hottest dinner tickets in town. It's headed up by chef Ludo Lefebvre, who uses native ingredients with flair in dishes such as bison tartare and Coloradan lamb chops with dandelion puree. The mood-lit Reynard Social bar is good for cocktails like tybert's tailspin, made with Barr Hill Tom Cat gin, St Germain, Aperol, honey and fresh lemon. From \$299 (£238). [hyatt.com](https://hyatt.com) [denver.org](https://denver.org)



From top: Sunrise over Civic Center Park; a mountain-view room at Thompson Denver; the lobby at Limelight Denver





Cannoli in a Sicilian street-food market  
Above: The ancient ruins of Agrigento, a UNESCO site  
Below: La Vucciria market in Palermo



## FAMILY

# SWEET SICILY

Start in Palermo and head west for a family adventure featuring street food, ancient ruins and a magical night tour of the city

## Palermo by night

To beat the heat of the Sicilian capital in summer, try venturing into town after dusk for a guided night tour, when Palermo's landmarks are magically illuminated. The walk can take in city highlights such as the medieval Kalsa district, the Arabesque domes of San Giovanni degli Eremiti, the Norman cathedral of Monreale and UNESCO-listed Zisa palace. [getyourguide.com](http://getyourguide.com)

## Gangster's paradise

Unpick the island's deep-rooted connection with the Sicilian Mafia, known locally as Cosa Nostra, at Palermo's No Mafia Memorial museum. It explains the origins of the crime cartel and the government's efforts to quash the organisation after the Second World War. If you've got more time, there are also Mafia-related tours taking in the eastern villages of Savoca and Forza d'Agro, which were key filming locations for *The Godfather* — a good bet if you've got any movie-mad teens in tow. [nomafiameorial.org](http://nomafiameorial.org)

## Street-food specialities

Sicily's original thick-crust pizza is a must try. There's a topping for every palate so picky eaters are bound to find something they like; the more adventurous should go for the classic, which includes anchovies, herbs and strong cheese on a passata base. For dessert it's cannoli, deep-fried pastry tubes filled with sweet ricotta, that take centre stage. Arancini — fried risotto balls — are another favourite for a cheap meal on the go. A Palermo street-food tour is a fun way to explore for those whose kids love to try new dishes.

## Sicily's sweet-making centre

With its sloping cobbled streets and crowning castle, Erice — around 70 miles west of Palermo — has a fairytale quality. But in Sicily this town is best known for its almond pastries — especially those made by local pastry chef Maria Grammatico, whose stories have been immortalised in the biography *Bitter Almonds*, by Mary Taylor Simeti. Follow the sweet scent of powdered sugar down winding lanes to find her old-fashioned bakery and encourage the kids to order *belli e brutti* — 'beautiful and ugly' — a buttery bite-size pastry laced with almonds and lemon. [mariagrammatico.it](http://mariagrammatico.it)

## Archaeology discoveries

Sicily has more than its fair share of ruins and many of the best are in the west of the island. Closest to Palermo is the fifth-century Segesta Archaeological Park, around 47 miles west of the capital, which offers panoramic views from a Hellenic theatre atop Monte Barbaro. But Sicily's finest ruins can be found at the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento on the southwest coast — a UNESCO World Heritage site with one of the world's best-preserved Greek temples. [segestawelcome.com](http://segestawelcome.com) [parcovalleditempli.it](http://parcovalleditempli.it) **MARIA PIERI**

**HOW TO DO IT:** Abercrombie & Kent offers a six-night trip including flights, transfers and guided tours in Erice, Segesta and more. The itinerary includes two nights at the 19th-century Villa Ignea in Palermo and four nights at the 500-acre Verdura Resort on the southwest coast, offering uninterrupted sea views and a contemporary interpretation of Sicilian style. From £13,800 for a family of four. [abercrombiekent.co.uk](http://abercrombiekent.co.uk)



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## INSIDE GUIDE

# GDAŃSK

THE POLISH CITY HAS TRANSFORMED ITS FORMER PORT DISTRICTS, WITH TRENDY CRAFT BREWERIES AND HOTELS IN FORMER WAREHOUSES

The gateway to the beaches of the Polish Riviera and once a major seaport for northern Europe's Hanseatic League merchants, Gdańsk is a city framed by water and defined by proud maritime traditions. Famed as the birthplace of the European Solidarity labour movement in the late 20th century, its former worker neighbourhoods, islands and Baltic port districts have undergone a transformation in recent years.

To understand the city, you need to explore its past. Start in the central **Śródmieście** district, which incorporates parts of the Gdańsk waterfront and its Old Town. The area's pedestrianised **Royal Way** is a legacy of the period before the 18th century when Poland had a monarchy and Gdańsk was one of the country's three royal cities. Stroll past its mansions and former merchant houses, many built in the 16th and 17th centuries during Gdańsk's Golden Age. This thoroughfare is also home to many major museums, including the **Amber Museum**, which explores why Gdańsk is considered the world capital of amber. In summer, for a small fee, climb the tower in the nearby **Historical Museum of Gdańsk** for the best view of the city. [muzeumgdansk.pl](http://muzeumgdansk.pl)

At the end of the Royal Way lies the lively Motława River Embankment, lined with cafes, restaurants and the brick-and-timber **Gdańsk Crane** — a medieval port relic and symbol of the city's trading heritage. Nearing the end of a two-year renovation, it's set to reopen in spring with a new permanent exhibition inside. Across the river lies the **National Maritime Museum**. Tickets grant entry to the museum, the Crane and several Bay of Gdańsk outposts, including the Shipwreck Conservation Centre. [nmm.pl](http://nmm.pl)

The importance of the Gdańsk Shipyard and its workers is explored at the **European Solidarity Centre**, a 20-minute walk north of the Embankment. It's well worth the trip to learn how they were integral to Solidarity, a trade union founded in Gdańsk in 1980 that gave rise to a wider,

anti-communist movement that helped end Soviet rule in Poland in 1989. [ecs.gda.pl](http://ecs.gda.pl)

Dedicate at least one afternoon to exploring some of the city's many former port and warehouse districts, which have been transformed into trendy neighbourhoods over the past 10 years. The island of **Wyspa Spichrzów** — connected to the rest of the city centre by several bridges — is a good starting point. Here, centuries-old grain warehouses eviscerated by Second World War bombs still sit alongside restored ones now housing hotels and boutiques. You could drop by **Bar Mleczny Stągiewna** for an old-school Polish canteen experience, complete with dishes that hark back to the cuisine of the communist era, including cheap borscht and cabbage rolls. [barstagiewna.pl](http://barstagiewna.pl)

Just north of the city, the former **Gdańsk Shipyard** has also been impressively transformed, with cafes, bars and shops housed in repurposed shipping containers sitting in the shadow of defunct shipyard cranes. Seek out the once-connected **Royal Rifle Factory** and **Backyard**, whose names reveal their former functions. Today, both serve as spaces for exhibitions, markets and pop-up dining.

Thanks to the region's Germanic heritage, Gdańsk has a strong beer-brewing culture and is full of craft-beer venues. One of the best spots is **Brovarnia**, the first brewpub in northern Poland. Housed inside a restored former granary building, it specialises in Czech-style beers paired with hearty Czech-inspired food. Another local favourite is **Labeerynt**, a cosy basement bar with a rotating selection of beers. The buzzy student neighbourhood of **Wrzeszcz**, a short tram ride north west of the city centre, is home to **Browar Spółdzielczy**, a pub managed as a social cooperative that runs projects for locals with disabilities. It has 20 of its own beers on tap, from IPAs to sours. [brovarnia.pl](http://brovarnia.pl) [labeerynt.pl](http://labeerynt.pl) [en.browarspoldzielczy.com](http://en.browarspoldzielczy.com) **AMY MCPHERSON**

### LIKE A LOCAL

#### Anna Dudzinska's favourite concept stores in Wrzeszcz

Gdańsk-based fashion designer Anna has her own knitwear brand, Dudzinska. [annadudzinska.com](http://annadudzinska.com)



#### POP CONCEPT STORE

A great place for Polish clothing, accessories and homewares. I come for unusual home accessories and shoes from Balagan. [instagram.com/popconceptstore.pl](http://instagram.com/popconceptstore.pl)

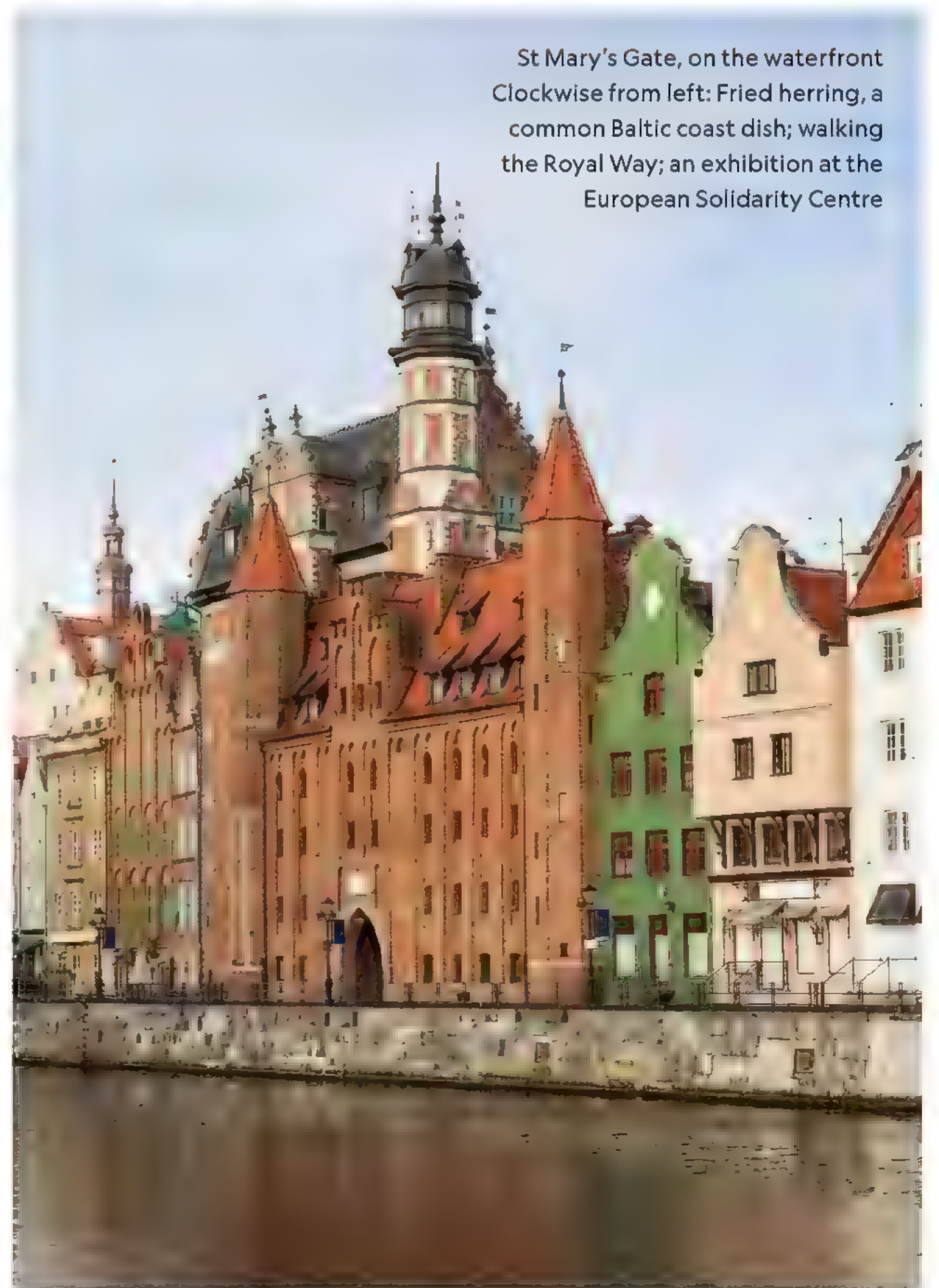
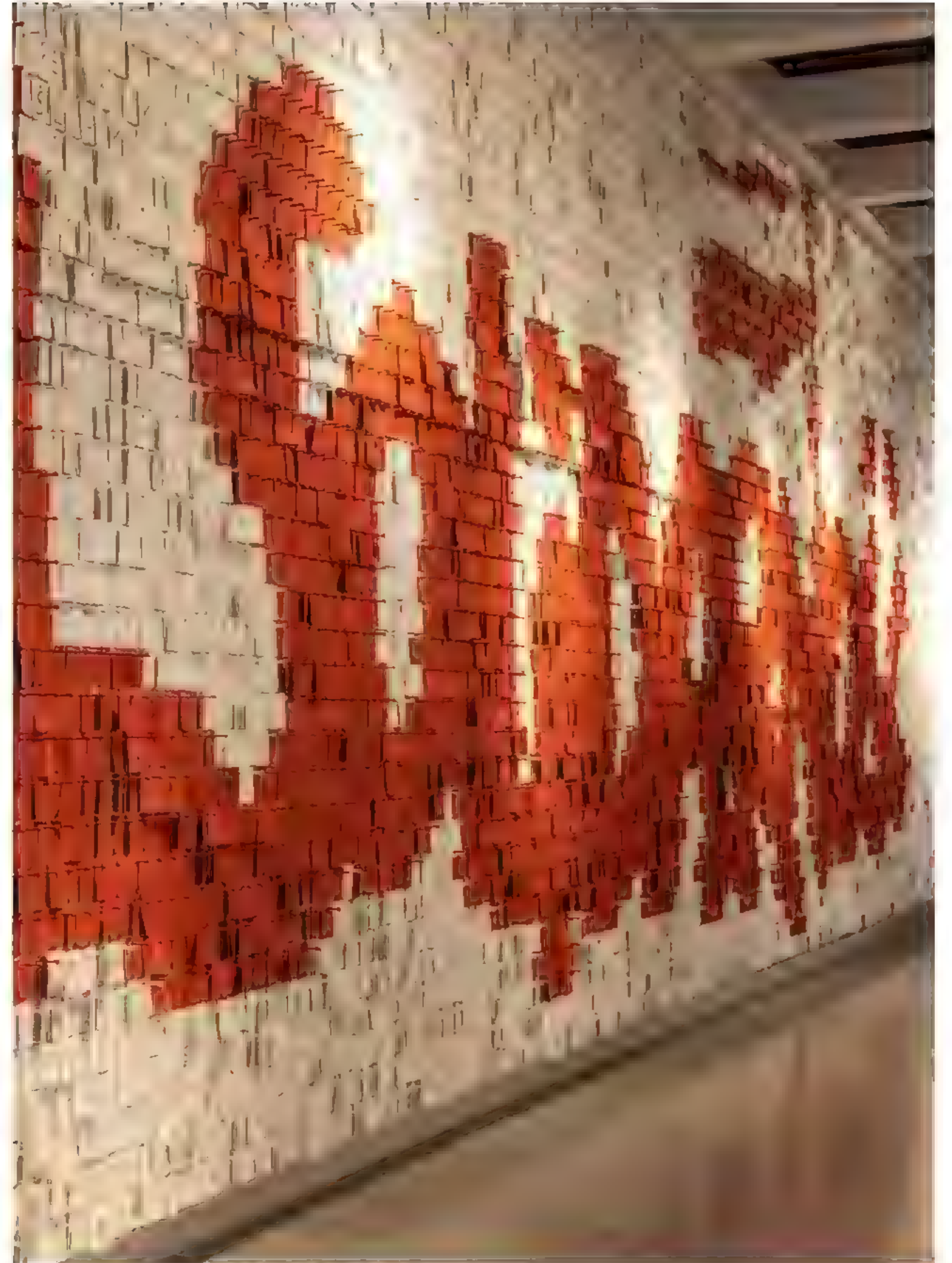
#### 88 CONCEPT

Visit for a selection of high-quality independent European labels with unusual designs for women, and cosmetics made from natural materials. I love the timeless fashion basics. [88concept.pl](http://88concept.pl)

#### THE ODDER SIDE

Founded by friends Justyna Przygońska and Brygida Handzelewicz-Wacławek, this popular Polish fashion brand specialises in a street style with a feminine touch. [theodderside.com](http://theodderside.com)





St Mary's Gate, on the waterfront  
Clockwise from left: Fried herring, a  
common Baltic coast dish; walking  
the Royal Way; an exhibition at the  
European Solidarity Centre

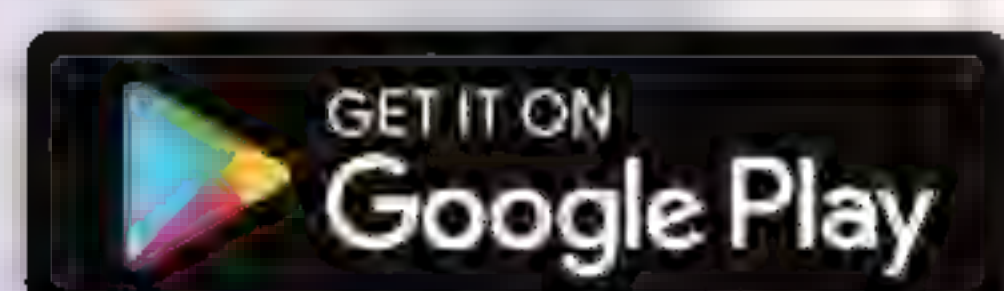
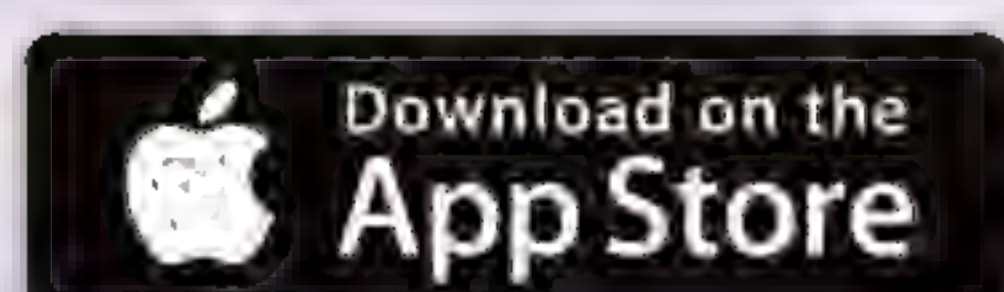
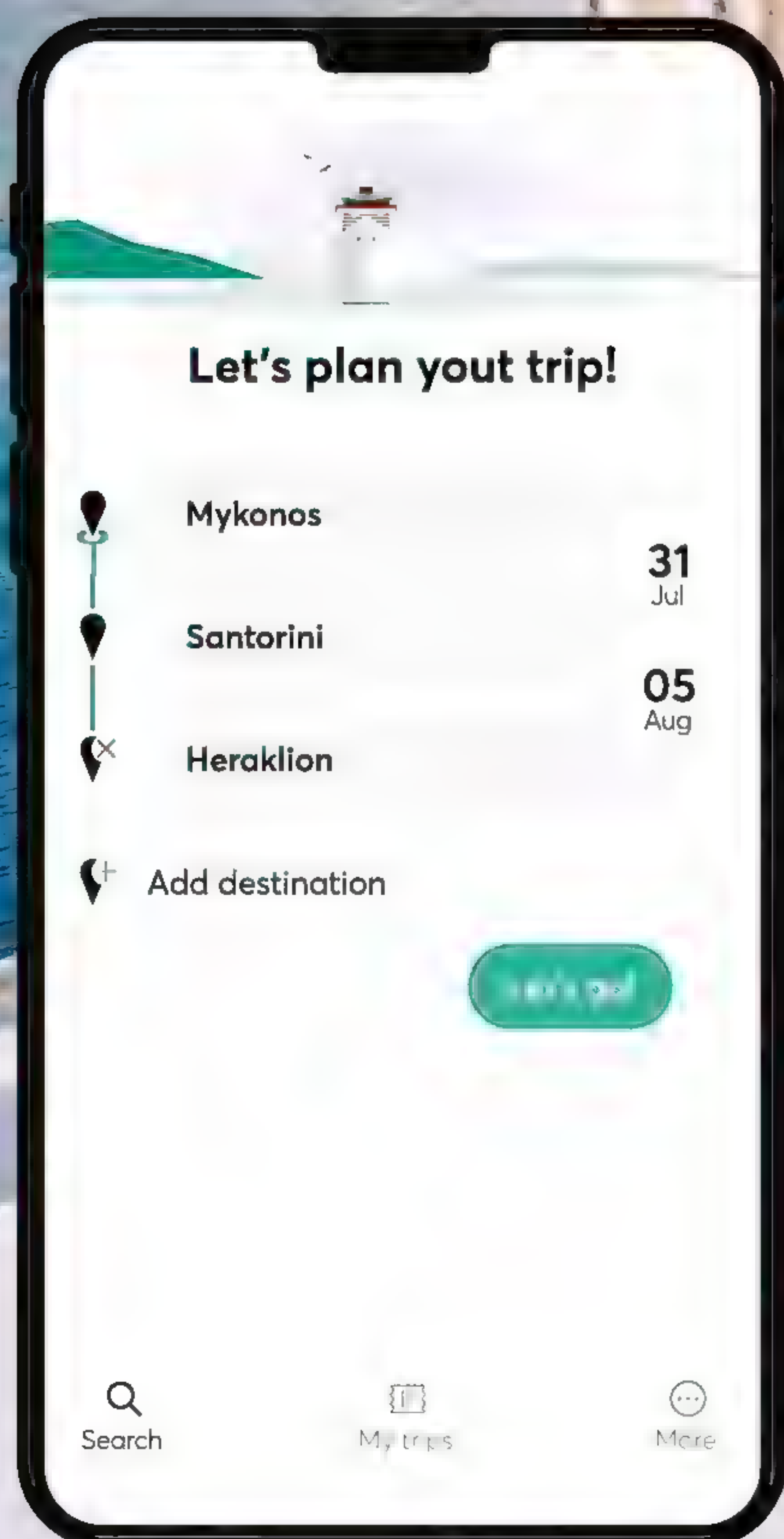


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STAY AT HOME

# NORTHUMBERLAND COAST

With seaside trails, castles and even a pilgrimage site, this coastal stretch of North East England warrants weeks of exploration

## Why go?

Windswept and wild, the coastal stretch of Northumberland has a real sense of space and isolation. Due to its strategic location close to England's border with Scotland, the county has more than 70 castle sites, too — some ruined, some still as grand as when they were built, many overlooking the sea. Highlights include Bamburgh Castle, dating back millennia, and Alnwick Castle, which featured as Hogwarts in the Harry Potter films. During spring or summer, a boat trip out to the Farne Islands offers the chance to see one of the UK's largest puffin colonies; summer or autumn is the time to see grey seals. [visitnorthumberland.com](https://visitnorthumberland.com)

## What to do

The Northumberland Coast Path stretches for 62 miles from Cresswell to Berwick-upon-Tweed. It is split into six stages, and tackling anything between six and 13 miles is realistic for most people. The 10-mile Craster to Seahouses section is regularly cited as one of the country's best walks, with the ruins of 700-year-old Dunstanburgh Castle, sandy beaches and rocky foreshore. [northumberlandcoastpath.org](https://northumberlandcoastpath.org)

## Where to eat

The fishing village of Craster is famous for kippers and the smokehouses where North Sea herring is cured. L Robson & Sons has

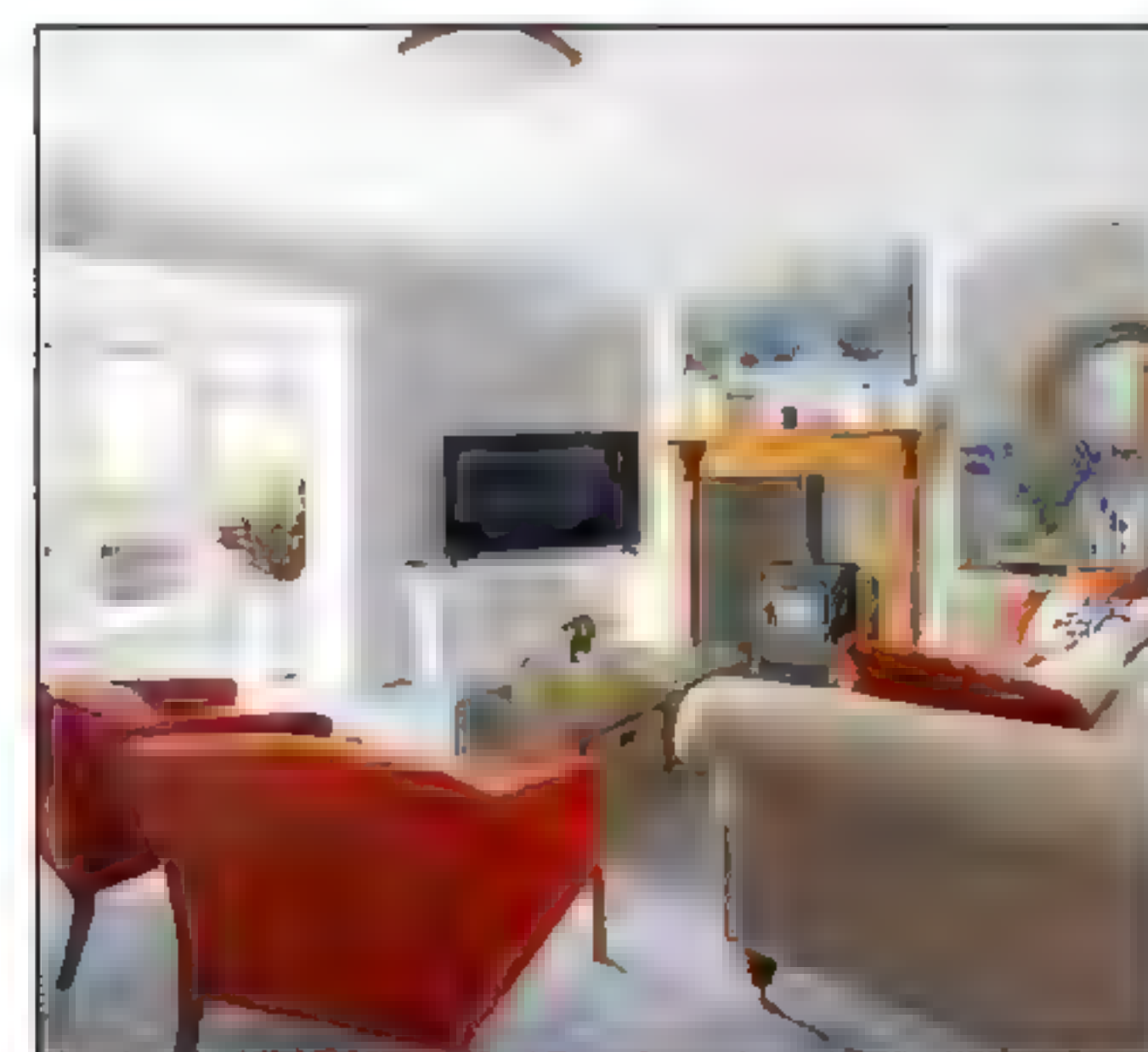
been operating for over a century, and the fourth-generation family shop remains popular. Across the road, the aptly named Jolly Fisherman is everything you could want from a pub — particularly on dark, stormy nights, when you're greeted by a roaring fire. The menu is a cut above the average, with oysters and crab. [kipper.co.uk](https://kipper.co.uk) [thejollyfishermancraster.co.uk](https://thejollyfishermancraster.co.uk)

## We like

England's northernmost town, Georgian Berwick-upon-Tweed's position a few miles from the Scottish border means it's changed hands between England and Scotland 13 times. Its 16th-century fortifications are some of Europe's best preserved and are entirely walkable. There's also the Victorian Royal Border Bridge crossing the River Tweed, plus sandstone streets with art galleries, cool cafes and independent shops. [visitberwick.com](https://visitberwick.com)

## Don't miss

The Holy Island of Lindisfarne retains the sense of mystery it's had since a monastery was built here in 635 CE. Its founder, St Aidan, is credited with bringing Christianity to north England's pagan Saxons, making this a pilgrimage site. It's only accessible by a causeway according to the tide; check for safe crossing times on the website. [english-heritage.org.uk](https://english-heritage.org.uk) [nationaltrust.org.uk](https://nationaltrust.org.uk) **PAT RIDDELL**



## WHERE TO STAY

Overlooking the coast, Sea Breeze is a refurbished self-catering house with subtle nautical-themed touches and plenty of windows from which to admire the view. Sleeping six, there are three bedrooms, an upstairs sitting room, a TV lounge and a conservatory, plus a balcony and patio. Available through Crabtree & Crabtree, from £994 for seven nights or from £746 for three nights. [crabtreeandcrabtree.com](https://crabtreeandcrabtree.com)

Above: Bamburgh Castle has been used as a filming location over the years



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## BOOKS

# Food for thought

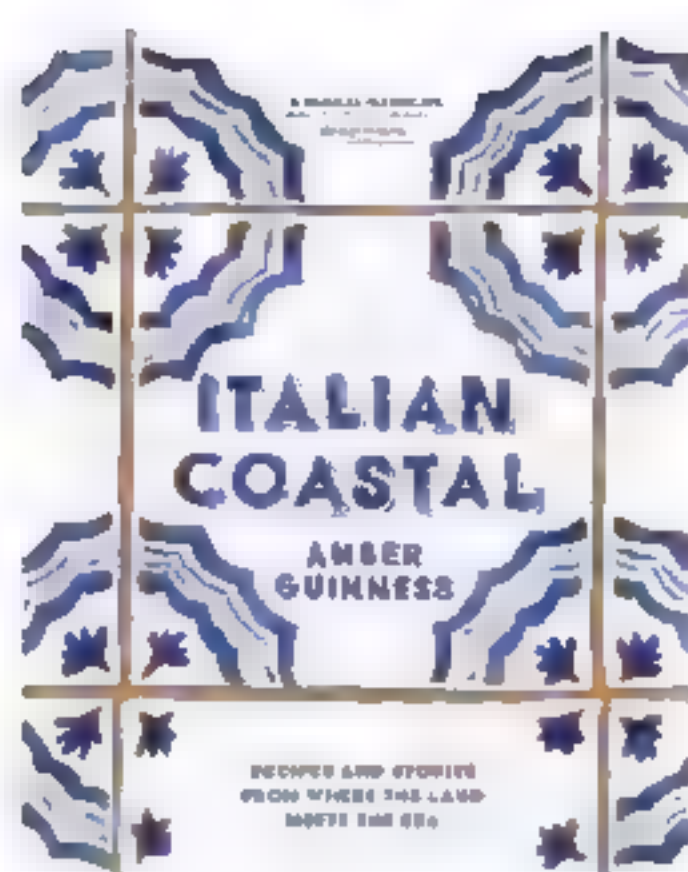
READ YOUR WAY AROUND THE WORLD WITH THIS CROP OF TASTY NEW TRAVEL BOOKS



## China in Seven Banquets

A 'flavourful history' of 500 years of Chinese cuisine via seven storied dinners. Food historian Thomas David DuBois shares his findings from decades of travelling around China, revealing

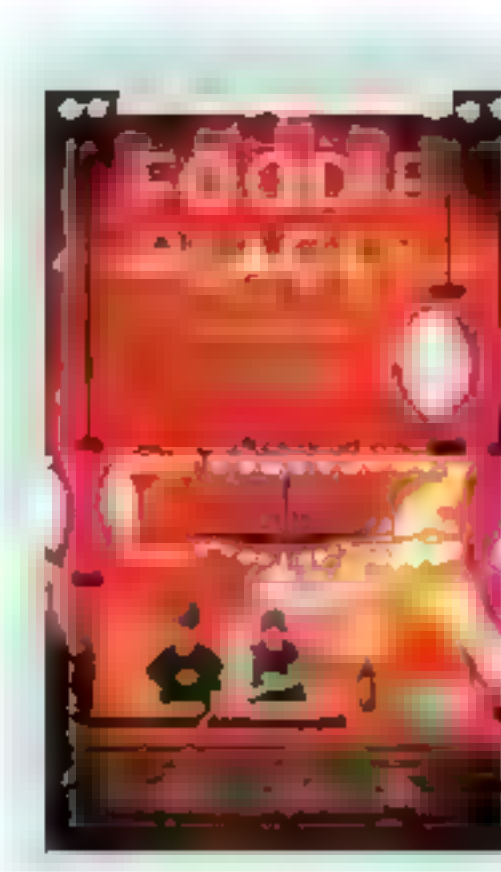
the country's culinary character through meals including the 'tail-burning' banquet of the Tang dynasty, plus insights into food featured in Chinese literature and film, a New Year's buffet from 1920s Shanghai and a 21st-century delivery menu. *Reaktion Books, £18*



## Italian Coastal

Take a culinary tour along Italian shores from Tuscany to Northern Sicily with Amber Guinness. The food writer blends travelogue, memoir and cooking insights,

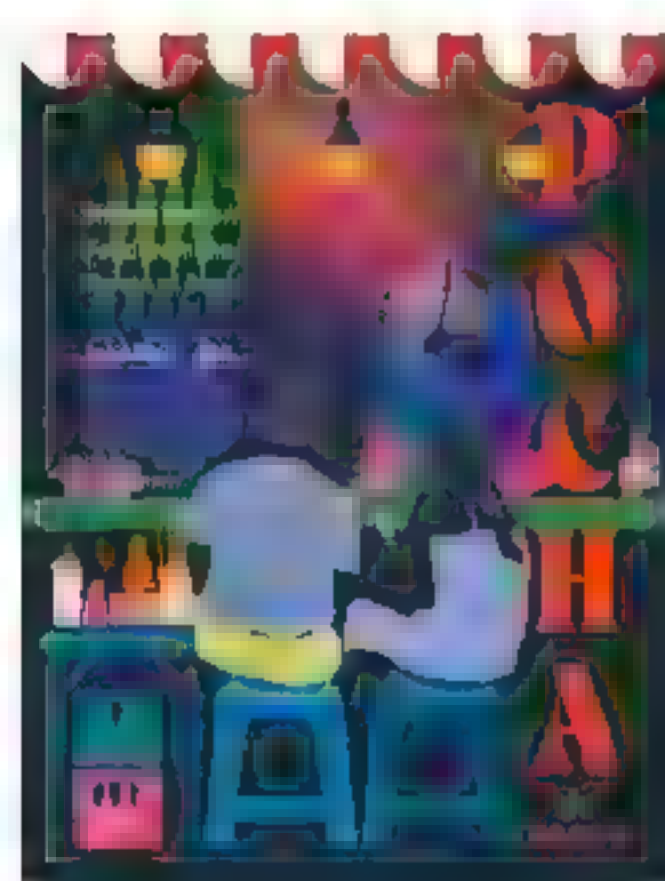
singling out 60 easy-to-make recipes that offer a taste of specific Italian seaside regions — and the stories behind them — including potato and caper salad from the island of Salina and the ultimate Amalfi lemon cream cake. *Thames & Hudson, £29.99*



## Foodie Places

Travel writer Sarah Baxter and illustrator Amy Grimes serve up a guide to 25 food destinations, uncovering local delicacies like pastries handmade by nuns in Portugal, vegan curries in Southern India — where

plant-based dishes have been offered to gods and pilgrims for centuries — and paella from its Spanish birthplace in Valencia. Plus, visits to contemporary food capitals Montreal, Osaka and Melbourne, famed for global dishes and fusion food. *White Lion Publishing, £14.99*



## Pocha

Korean-born food writer Su Scott returns to her native Seoul to eat her way around the city's *pocha* street stalls. Short for *pojangmacha* ('covered wagon'), they include everything from

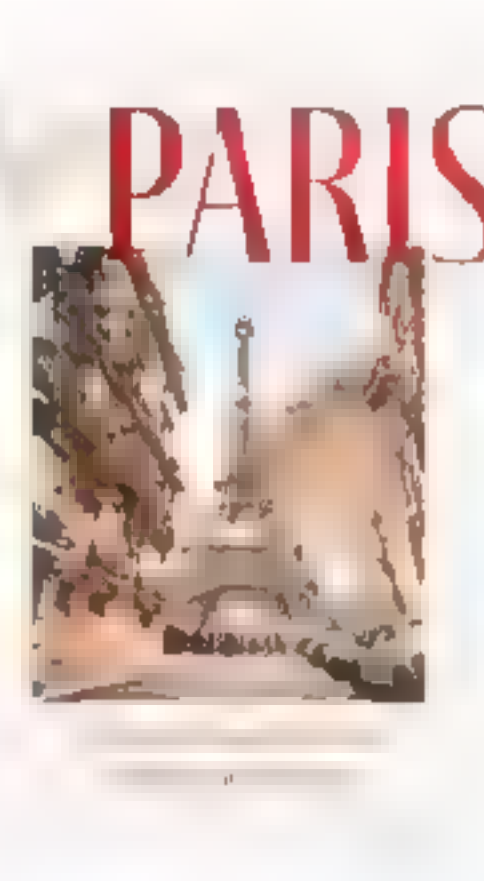
a tarpaulin-covered stall to a makeshift bar where snacks are served. It's a personal take on this lively destination, rendered through vibrant photography and 80 recipes covering classics such as fried chicken and kimchi pancakes. *Quadrille, £27*



## The Food Adventurers

Professor of food studies and history, David E Bender shows how tourism has shaped our fascination with world cuisines through an examination of travel, from the age of the sailboat to the rise of the

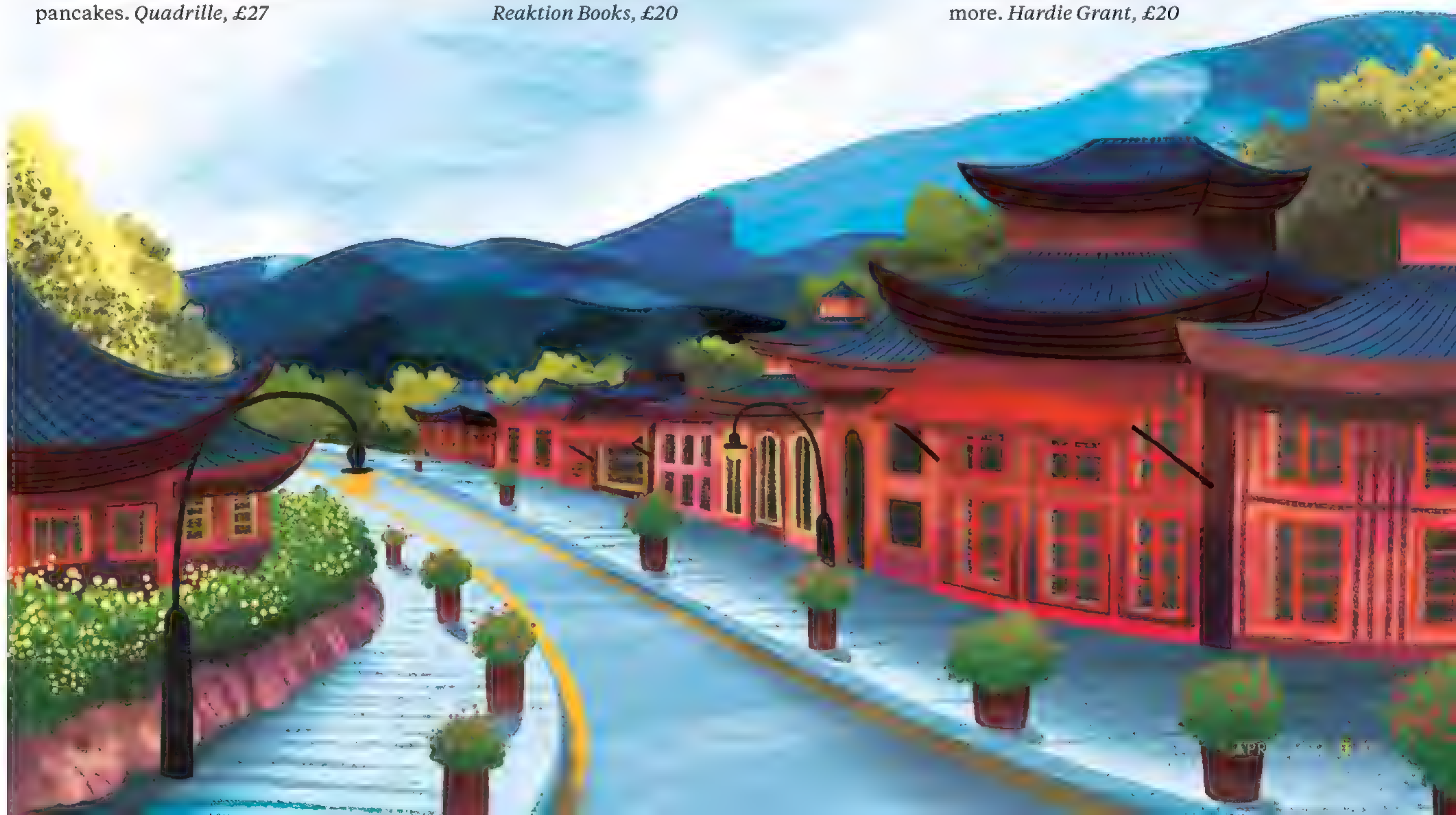
jet plane. He looks at how we eat on the road, covering subjects such as Tahitian roast pig in the 1840s, the colonial 'discoveries' of fruit like the mangosteen, 1970s hotel restaurants and caviar served on board luxury cruise liners. *Reaktion Books, £20*



## At the Table in Paris

Try out the recipes served in Paris's best bistros, cafes and restaurants in this culinary tour that takes in classic spots along the Seine as well as more local hangouts in hip

'hoods like Belleville. Divided into meals of the day, it includes 40 recipes typically enjoyed in France, including moules frites, coq au vin and creme brulee, plus plenty of practical tips on food shops, markets and more. *Hardie Grant, £20*





KIT LIST

# CAMPERVANNING

From a portable generator to convenient cookware, products that multi-task or pack away easily are the key to making the most of limited space



**1 CUBE FIRE BASKET**

Bring warmth to evenings by your campervan with this multipurpose fire basket. Add the grill grid to use it as a barbecue, and when the flames go out, simply turn it upside down — the ashes will get stored in its inner tray without spilling. It also comes with a fitted wooden board, so it can be used as a stool or table, too. £379. [uk.hofats.com](http://uk.hofats.com)

**2 JACKERY EXPLORER 300 PLUS PORTABLE POWER STATION AND SOLARSAGA PANELS**

Weighing just over 3.5kg but still durable for outdoor use, this portable power station can charge up to four devices at once. Power it up through the AC adaptor in two hours, via solar panels in four or using the vehicle adaptor in five and a half. £319. [uk.jackery.com](http://uk.jackery.com)

**3 OUTWELL SKYROS ORGANISATION UNIT**

Keep your campervan tidy with this four-shelf cupboard unit. Holding up to 30kg, it has an aluminium frame, a laminated top, a zippable door and mesh for ventilation, plus side pockets. It's straightforward to assemble and comes with a bag so you can tuck it away when not in use. £119.99. [outwell.com](http://outwell.com)

**4 BEACHBUM BROBE**

From days by the sea to evenings around the fire, stay warm and dry outdoors with this robe made entirely from recycled materials. The thick fleece lining provides immediate warmth while the nylon outer layer is designed to be 100% water- and windproof. The oversized fit also means you can change underneath. £130. [beachbumsup.com](http://beachbumsup.com)

**5 RIDGEMONKEY CONNECT DEEP PAN AND GRIDDLE**

This durable yet lightweight kitchen multitasker makes the most of limited space. A detachable hinge system converts one pan into a saucepan or a separate griddle pan, which can also act as a lid on the first, deeper pan. The cool-touch handles are removable to fit into cabinets. £31.99. [ridgemonkey.co.uk](http://ridgemonkey.co.uk)

**6 STANLEY QUENCHER H2.O FLOWSTATE TUMBLER**

Made of 90% recycled stainless steel, this 1.2L tumbler is ideal for long road trips, keeping drinks cold for 11 hours, or 48 hours when iced, and hot for seven. It's designed with a carry handle and narrow base to fit in most car cup holders, and the straw opening is constructed to prevent splashes. £44.99. [uk.stanley1913.com](http://uk.stanley1913.com)

**7 DUVALAY COMFORT SLEEPING BAG**

Cosier than a traditional sleeping bag, this two-in-one duvet and mattress topper will ensure a good night's sleep no matter how cramped the space. The memory foam base adds comfort to a hard mattress, or you can use it on its own as a bed. It's quick to roll up, with straps to secure it in place. £169.95. [duvalay.co.uk](http://duvalay.co.uk)

**8 OUTDOOR REVOLUTION CAPRI TABLE AND STOOLS**

Great for al fresco dining while you're on the road, this set has stools that fold away into the table, which then folds into itself for transport and storage. Made from durable aluminium to withstand the weather, the table surface is heat-resistant. £79.99. [outdoor-revolution.com](http://outdoor-revolution.com)  
**EMMA MONK**



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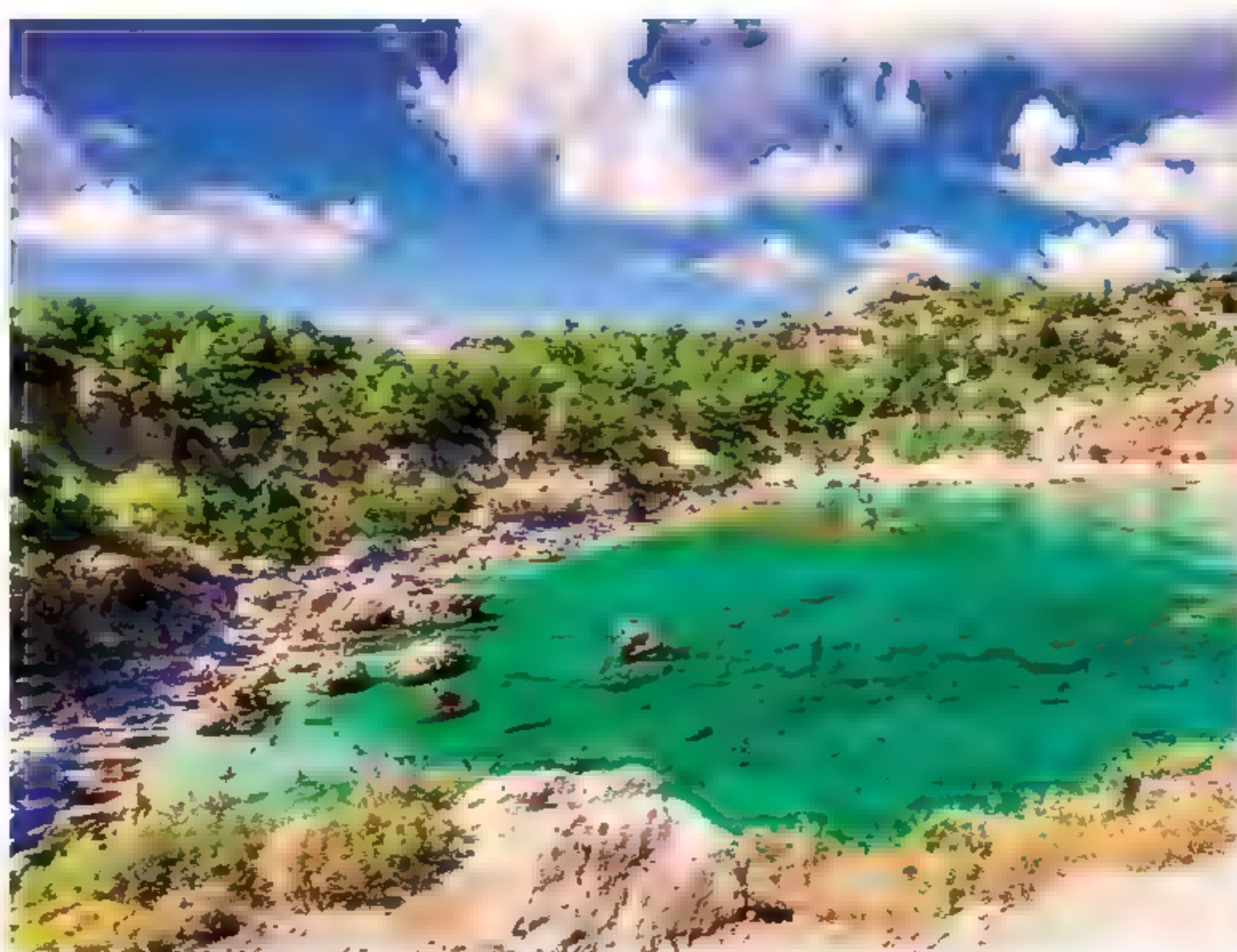
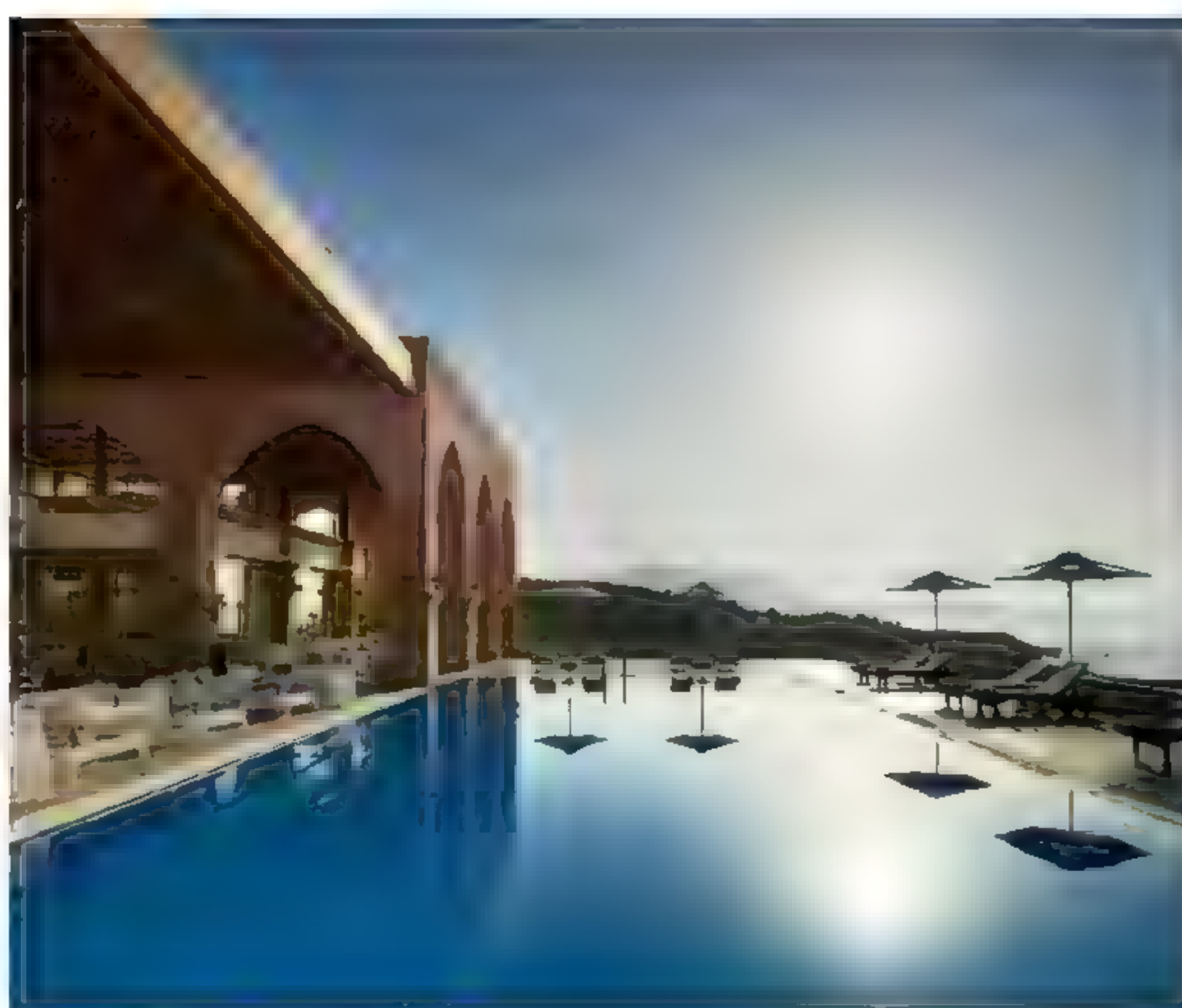
*National Geographic Traveller (UK) is teaming up with Visit Greece, Aegean Airlines and H Hotels Collection to offer a getaway to Rhodes*

## THE DESTINATION

In the Dodecanese, Rhodes is a favourite for visitors to the Greek islands. The old town of Rhodes city captures the imagination with a UNESCO-listed medieval citadel, a gothic castle and tales of valorous knights. Outside the city walls, there are almost 160 miles of coastline and mountains carpeted by pine forests. Experience it from Boutique 5 Hotel & Spa, the local outpost of H Hotels Collection. This five-star, adults-only property is just a few steps from Kiotari beach and a 20-minute drive from the clifftop village of Lindos. Relax by the sea, unwind at the spa and end the day at Impressions, the on-site restaurant serving Mediterranean dishes like cod salad with sea fennel and capers, and sea bream with fish roe and cuttlefish ink foam.

## THE PRIZE

Courtesy of Visit Greece, Aegean Airlines and H Hotels Collection, the winner and a guest will enjoy a five-night stay in Rhodes at Boutique 5 Hotel & Spa on a half-board basis. The prize includes return flights in comfort economy class from the UK to Rhodes with one checked bag per person, as well as return airport transfers in Rhodes. A member of Star Alliance and Greece's largest airline, Aegean has been named Best Regional Airline at the Skytrax World Airline Awards in Europe 12 times in the last 13 years. [visitgreece.gr](http://visitgreece.gr) [aegeanair.com](http://aegeanair.com) [hhotels.gr](http://hhotels.gr)



From top: The Palace of the Grand Master of the Knights, Rhodes; Boutique 5, H Hotels Collection; Anthony Quinn bay

## TO ENTER

Answer the following question online at [natgeotv.com/uk/competitions](http://natgeotv.com/uk/competitions)

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Competition closes on 30 April 2024. The winner must be a UK resident and aged 18 or over. Full T&Cs at [natgeotv.com/uk/competitions](http://natgeotv.com/uk/competitions)



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AEGEAN



# Education for Planetary Flourishing



This International Earth Day (April 22, 2024), UNESCO MGIEP seeks to promote **Education for Planetary Flourishing**.

**Planetary flourishing is the radical idea that a good life is the right of all life forms on the planet.**

To do so, UNESCO MGIEP asserts that education must build kindness towards self, others and nature for the world to achieve the SDGs. Education must train the brain on how the planet is shared with all beings and unless we **all** play our part, the planet will not flourish.



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## NOTES FROM AN AUTHOR

## ADAM ALEXANDER

A rare chilli in northern India provides the 'Seed Detective' with inspiration for a book about remarkable vegetables and where to find them

The sun was rising through the dusty haze of a city waking up with a collective hangover: the result of a day of kite flying followed by beer and a night sky filled with ascending lanterns. Jaipur had been celebrating Makar Sankranti, the Hindu festival marking the sun crossing the Tropic of Cancer on 14 January, which coincides with its International Kite Festival. But now, with the party over, I began a journey that was to set me on a literary adventure I'd never expected to take.

I've been growing crops pretty much my whole life and, ever since a chance encounter with a particularly wonderful pepper in Donetsk during the dying days of the Soviet Union, I've sought out delicious heritage vegetables that are part of local food cultures worldwide. And after seeing the incredible diversity of local fruits and vegetables crowding Rajasthan's markets, I wanted to meet farmers growing the crops fundamental to regional cuisine.

Accompanied by my guide, Narendra Chitawa, we drove to the village of Begas, an hour west of Jaipur. The farms in this region form a patchwork of small fields — in winter, green with barley and mustard crops just coming into flower, others standing empty after the millet harvest. Giant stacks of straw the size of mud huts stood by stately neem trees. Alongside a bumpy track, rows of vegetables, including tomatoes, grew under billowing lengths of fleece as a protection against frost.

The statuesque young horticulturalist Shankar Sharma — co-owner of the 15-acre farm with his sisters — came to meet us. Everywhere, marigolds were in full flower, woven among the courgettes, mingling with the tomatoes. An important source of Shankar's income, they're picked daily and sold in the local market. But it was the tomatoes that most interested me, and one variety especially, called abhilash. Shankar was especially fond of abhilash and thought it was the most tasty when cooked in a masala, and he'd been saving its seeds for many years. Naturally, I wondered if I could grow this variety at home. Would the fruits ripen late into the season when temperatures were low, just like they were that morning?

Much of Rajasthan receives less than 500mm of rain a year, and the challenges facing farmers in the semi-arid areas near Jaipur are considerable. Winter, when farmers are busiest, is always dry. This means that the



seeds farmers save have been selected and bred to flourish in a very challenging climate. Rajasthanis are passionate about their local vegetables, which locals describe as 'desi', and the visceral connection that everyone I met has with the crops they grow set me wondering if tales of the vegetables of Rajasthan belonged in a book. But it was to be a humble chilli that proved the catalyst for *The Seed Detective*.

My journey through Rajasthan took me to several wonderful cities, and it was in Bikaner that a group of university plant scientists told me that one of Rajasthan's most culturally important vegetables, the mathania chilli, had disappeared from cultivation. Farmers had chosen to grow modern varieties promising greater yields, resulting in accidental cross-pollination, which had changed mathania's appearance and taste. Prized for its fruity, gently spicy qualities, the chilli had been a fundamental part of Rajasthani cuisine for hundreds of years. Now, the original was believed lost. But I wasn't convinced.

It was once again time to take a bumpy ride in the back of an old Jeep, a good hour's drive north of the great fortress city of Jodhpur. I knew that any survivors would have to be grown in isolation, and luck was on my side.

This is a beautiful part of the world; rolling hills sparse in vegetation contain small fields lined by drystone walls. Within this neatly managed landscape, all manner of local crop varieties grow. At a small enclosure of beautiful Rajasthani sheep next to a homestead of three whitewashed, round cob buildings, the farmer, Ashi Devi, had a small pile of just-harvested chillies in one corner. Could these be the famous mathania I was looking for?

My guide, Pritam Singh, suggested we taste and see — quickly assuring me that what we were now savouring was indeed the real thing. And it was then that I knew that I had to tell him not only the story of the mathania chilli, but also where so many of my favourite vegetables had come from. The story of vegetables that began as wild indigenous plants to become much-loved cultivated crops — their journeys from untamed parent to domesticated child.

Adam Alexander is author of *The Seed Detective* — *Uncovering the Secret Histories of Remarkable Vegetables*, published by Chelsea Green, £12.99.

➤ [theseeddetective.co.uk](http://theseeddetective.co.uk)

**I've been growing crops pretty much my whole life and, ever since a chance encounter with a particularly wonderful pepper in Donetsk during the dying days of the Soviet Union, I've sought out delicious heritage vegetables that are part of local food cultures worldwide**



## MEET THE ADVENTURER

# Simon Reeve

THE ADVENTURER AND TV PRESENTER ON THE BEAUTY OF THE PLANET,  
WHAT BRINGS HIM HOPE AND FILMING HIS LATEST SERIES



**In your latest series, you're journeying to some of the planet's great wildernesses — the Congo rainforest, Patagonia, the Pacific Ocean's Coral Triangle and the Kalahari. Why focus on these areas now?** We have to know what's going on in these destinations, because then we can start to understand and respect them and hopefully love them, too. I think this is just about the most important series I've ever made as we're highlighting areas people know next to nothing about, but we're fundamentally connected to them as they govern and help shape the weather systems that affect us all. Unless we know about these areas and care for them, we'll ultimately lose them. I'm still a believer in the power of responsible, careful, sustainable travel in places like this, too. They need visitors to put some money into the local economy to protect and preserve the local nature.

**What did you learn from being out in the wild?** That there's still a wild planet out there. It's enormous and beautiful, and it's life-affirming to be a part of it. When we were filming the Patagonia episode, we were up high spending a night on an ice field. At about four in the morning, there I am at a ridge with my little portable potty and toilet roll, and I'm confronted by this incredible sight of dark mountains in front of me, illuminated by moonlight, the wind howling. I was transfixed by this night-time view of the mountains and the utter rawness of this wild moment.

**Do you have a standout moment from your travels?**

Yes! I was crawling on the ground with two San [Southern African Indigenous hunter-gatherers] trackers in the heart of the Kalahari in 2008, while filming the series *Tropic of Capricorn*. I only had my GoPro, and a small can of pepper spray to ward off any lions, should they fancy a nibble. We were trying to get up close to a herd of wildebeests and it felt as primal as anything I've ever done. It still sends a proper shiver down my spine thinking about that moment.

**Your series tend to have people at the centre of them.**

**What motivates you to tell the human stories in relation to nature and places?** I think it's become my little niche, perhaps. There's always going to be a story out there because of incredible humans who do extraordinary things. When I'm eventually told to hang up the passport, it's those interactions with people that I'll remember the most.

**Who's left the most lasting impression on you?** The people of Bangladesh. It's very poor, it's packed, it gets hammered by the natural world — flooding from the sea, flooding from the rivers. And yet there's a certain charisma and feistiness about people there — and a warmth, which I absolutely love.

**What gives you hope for the future of the planet?** We've not destroyed all of the nature yet. There's still a planet worth learning about, caring for and fighting for. Living on this tiny island off the coast of Europe, we don't realise the true scale of the world, how enormous some areas are and how many treasures they hold. And there are people such as Adams Cassinga [a wildlife activist who appears in the first episode of *Wilderness with Simon Reeve*]. He risks his life every day running this undercover organisation to take down illegal poachers and smuggling gangs in the Congo. People like him, local conservationists, give me hope.

**What does it take to push you out of your comfort zone?**

I don't like seeing children or elderly people suffering. I find that very difficult, where I feel impotent in a situation. One of my first TV journeys was in a former Soviet republic and an elderly woman came up begging at the table and she was the spitting image of my beloved grandma who'd died a few years earlier. I did the pathetic little I could and gave her the money I had but I was quite traumatised by that. It was utterly awful. I've had situations in areas of starvation where mothers tried to give me their babies. When you've had experiences like that, it gives you focus when you feel you're battling mosquitoes or the cold. It develops a state of mind where you're just lucky to be there and thankful to be experiencing it.

**INTERVIEW: KARLINA VALEIKO**

*Wilderness with Simon Reeve* is on BBC Two and iPlayer now.

**X** @simon\_reeve

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## WHAT'S ONLINE

# 10 OF THE BEST PLACES FOR STARGAZING IN THE UK

British skies dazzle when the sun sets, and a number of dark sky reserves and discovery sites can help enthusiasts explore the wonders of the galaxy. Words: Kerry Walker

## 1 BANNAU BRYCHEINIOG (BRECON BEACONS)

Bannau Brycheiniog National Park is also designated an International Dark Sky Reserve. Wrap up for the worst that the Welsh weather can throw at you before heading out into the dark, dark night. For some of the best glimpses of stars, constellations and meteor showers with dramatic backdrops, head for the remote Usk Reservoir in the west of the national park. There's also medieval Carreg Cennen Castle, the romantic ruins of Llanthony Priory in the Vale of Ewyas or the conical peak of Sugar Loaf in the Black Mountains. Maps and podcasts can be found online to help plan your stellar adventures. [bannau.wales](http://bannau.wales)

## 2 OM DARK SKY PARK & OBSERVATORY

In Northern Ireland's Sperrin Mountains, the Beaghmore Stone Circles of Davagh Forest harbour mysteries. Were they positioned here to chart the movements of the sun and moon, 3,500 years ago? Maybe. One thing's for sure: with no light pollution, the forest's heathery moors and wetlands provides crystal-clear views of night skies. Within Davagh Forest, the OM Dark Sky Park and Observatory has events from stargazing sessions to astronomy clubs. There's also the 'Stars and Stones Experience', where you learn about the Beaghmore Stones before gazing at the galaxy through a state-of-the-art telescope, with the option of glamping nearby. [omdarksky.com](http://omdarksky.com)

## 3 SOUTH DOWNS INTERNATIONAL DARK SKY RESERVE

Rolling across Southeast England, the chalk hills and lowland heath of the South Downs offer phenomenal stargazing just 50 miles from London. Here, you'll find a necklace of Dark Sky Discovery Sites to choose from: there's remote Bignor Hill, between Arundel and Petworth, for Milky Way gazing on moonless nights; or the Devil's Dyke at Suddlescombe, near Brighton, described by landscape painter John Constable as 'the grandest view in the world'. Old Winchester Hill, an Iron Age hillfort, is another pitch-black alternative. [southdowns.gov.uk](http://southdowns.gov.uk)

[READ MORE ONLINE](#)

## TOP STORIES

Here's what you've been enjoying on the website this month



### FOOD

#### The UK's best vegan experiences

From burritos in Brighton to fake steaks in Wales, the plant-based dining scene continues to evolve



### WELLNESS

#### Where to try contrast bathing

Spas such as Finnish saunas and Korean *jjimjilbangs* alternate between intense heat and cold



### HEALTH

#### Dementia-friendly travel

The novelty, exercise and social benefits of taking a trip can benefit many people with the condition



# PLAN A GOURMET WEEKEND IN SOUTH SOMERSET

KNOWN FOR ITS CIDER AND CHEDDAR, THIS REGION SHINES WITH LOCAL PRODUCE AND FARM-TO-TABLE DINING. WORDS: NATALIE PARIS

Around a decade ago, the town of Bruton threw a spotlight on Somerset’s gourmet credentials, encouraging visitors to linger over food and art at its new Hauser & Wirth gallery. The influence of the town’s restaurants — among them Osip and Roth Bar & Grill — has since spread to establishments in the surrounding countryside, including the following.

**THE THREE HORSESHOES, BATCOMBE**  
Chef Margot Henderson opened this restaurant in 2023. Wooden beams and a centuries-old church bench are highlights of the knocked-through interiors. The food is similarly straight-talking, with Dorset scallops that are a vinegary joy and an excellent mince on toast. [thethreehorseshoesbatcombe.co.uk](http://thethreehorseshoesbatcombe.co.uk)

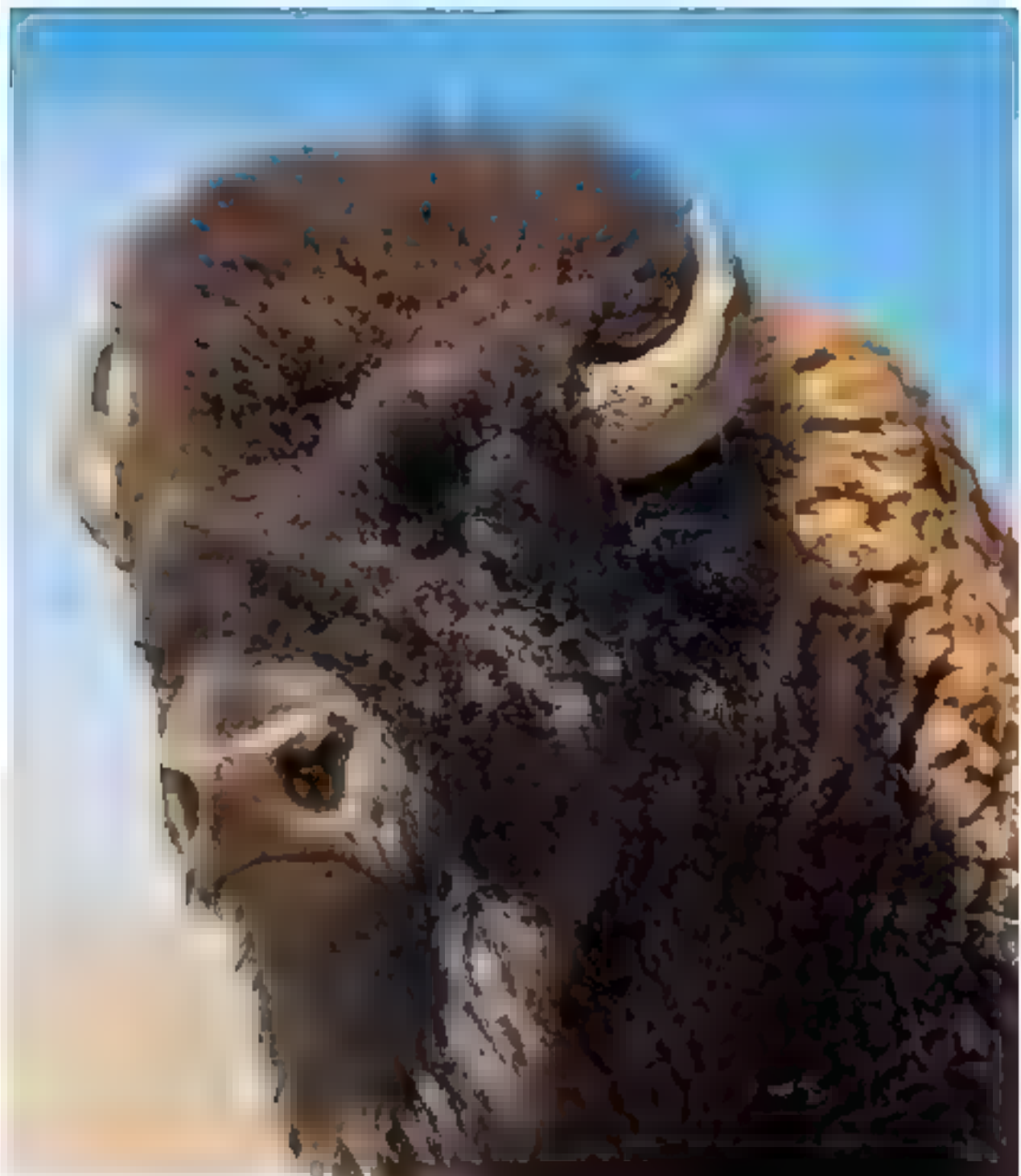
**HORRELL & HORRELL, SPARKFORD**  
With a set menu, long banqueting table and an out-of-the-way barn location, Horrell & Horrell turns every single meal into an event. Expect punchy flavours in dishes such as sharing platters of lamb and tabbouleh with Jerseys potatoes roasted in red wine and garlic. [horrellandhorrell.co.uk](http://horrellandhorrell.co.uk)

**HOLM, SOUTH PETHERTON**  
Set in a former bank, Holm is a clean, contemporary space with a kitchen garden for barbecue nights. Lightly fluffed Westcombe cheddar fries are Holm’s calling card, but the torched mackerel, with turnip in buttermilk, is equally memorable. [holmsomerset.co.uk](http://holmsomerset.co.uk)  
**READ MORE ONLINE**



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## BEYOND THE TRAVEL SECTION



### I ANIMALS I

**14 bison came to Santa Catalina for a film in 1924. What’s next?**  
The invasive species was brought to this Californian Channel Island a century ago. Now, conservationists face a complicated decision over their impact on the ecosystem. [natgeo.com/animals](http://natgeo.com/animals)

### I SCIENCE I

**You can now listen to an eclipse**  
On 8 April, one of the decade’s most talked-about interstellar events will take place in North America: a total solar eclipse. A new device will allow visually impaired people to experience it. [natgeo.com/science](http://natgeo.com/science)

### I HISTORY I

**The real-life story of ‘Cocaine Godmother’ Griselda Blanco**  
Now the subject of a Netflix series, Griselda Blanco clawed her way out of poverty to a billion-dollar, blood-soaked empire — a real-life story that’s stranger than fiction. [natgeo.com/history](http://natgeo.com/history)

IMAGES: GETTY; HOLM, SOUTH PETHERTON; SYLVAN KALVIAC; TED LOGARDT; JOHN ABBOTT/NATURE PICTURE LIBRARY; BETTY BOSSI/PICTURE PRESS, REDUX



**WILDLIFE**  
**National parks for bug lovers**  
Smiley spiders in Hawaii, water-repelling flies in Utah: these amazing insects are worth the trip



**CULTURE**  
**Kitchen divination**  
In many cultures, kitchen staples such as tea leaves and cheese are used to predict the future



**SPORT**  
**Wild skating**  
It may require extra caution, but wild ice offers some of the best skating opportunities out there

## SEARCH FOR NATGEOTRAVELUK

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WEEKENDER

# KOSOVO

Explore this largely unsung Balkan nation and its burgeoning adventure travel scene, with monasteries and minarets on the doorstep of mighty mountain canyons in the southwest of the country. Words: Sarah Reid

A small, mountainous nation in the Balkans, Kosovo is a largely unrecognized country, at least by most of the region's governments. It's a tiny, landlocked country, with a population of just over 1.8 million, and it's the only country in the Balkans that's not a member of the European Union. It's a country that's been a part of the Balkan region for centuries, but it's only in the last few years that it's been recognized as an independent state. It's a country that's been a part of the Balkan region for centuries, but it's only in the last few years that it's been recognized as an independent state. It's a country that's been a part of the Balkan region for centuries, but it's only in the last few years that it's been recognized as an independent state.

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From left: The view across the medieval bridge to Prizren Old Town; shops and cafes line Farkëtarët, Prizren

## TOP FIVE Dishes to try

### BUREK

Introduced by the Ottomans, this flaky filo pastry filled with either soft local cheese, ground beef or spinach makes for a cheap and hearty breakfast. Kosovan *burek* is typically made by coiling filled pastry cylinders in a round pan then baking. The warm pie is then sliced into wedges to serve.

### AVJAR

Found on nearly every Kosovan table, this vibrant, spicy relish made with red pepper is designed to be spread on fresh bread. Kosovo's most ubiquitous vegetable, peppers are also commonly served as a starter, often stuffed with ground beef, rice and herbs and then baked.

### QEBAPA

Kosovo's answer to kofta, these cheap, skinless sausages are found on most restaurant menus. They're made of minced beef, pork or lamb meat. At most kebab shops, you can mix and match *qebapa* with other cuts of meats, which will be grilled for you and served with a choice of salads.

### SHOPE SALAD

Known as a *shopska* salad in other areas of the Balkans, this simple but delicious dish is made with tomatoes, cucumber, onions and olives, plus salty *sirene* cheese (similar to feta) grated over the top. It's the ideal starter if you plan to eat a heavy main course.

### TAVA

Named after the clay pot in which it's made, *tava* is a slow-cooked meat or vegetable dish often made with onions and soft cheese or sour cream, making it decadently rich. Mop up the juices with a freshly baked *pitalke* flatbread.

## DAY ONE CULTURE & CUISINE IN PRIZREN

### Morning

Prizren is home to an intriguing clutch of museums overlooking its namesake river's undulating northern bank. Begin at the Archaeology Museum, home to hundreds of artefacts unearthed in and around the city. The collection is housed in a 15th-century former Ottoman bathhouse, set beneath a clocktower dating from 1912. Climb its 100-odd stairs for sweeping views over the Old Town before moving on to the Ethnographical Museum on Bujar Godeni Street. Set in one of the city's few remaining Ottoman era homes, its eclectic displays of clothing, furniture and curios offer a window into 19th-century Prizren, then ablaze with radical ideas. For further insight, pay a visit to the Complex of the Albanian League of Prizren, the site of a 1878 assembly that saw local leaders first propose a united Albanian state that would have included what is now Kosovo.

### Afternoon

Cross the 16th-century stone bridge spanning the river and tuck into a traditional lunch at Ambient, a restaurant with tables spread along the waterfront. Work off your *tava* (a casserole-style dish cooked in a clay pot) with a short but steep hike up past the Old Town's lofty hillside church to Prizren Fortress. Originally built by the Byzantines and expanded by a succession of Serbian kings and Ottoman rulers, the fortress site has been in use since the Bronze Age. Damaged during the Yugoslav Wars, the fortification has since undergone a major restoration, offering a glimpse of its former glory. Don't miss the main building's displays of Neolithic pottery and Ottoman-era relics, and be sure to time your visit for sunset, when the city below takes on a golden hue. The fortress occasionally hosts concerts in the summer months. [facebook.com/ambientrestaurantprizren](https://facebook.com/ambientrestaurantprizren)

### Evening

Prizren's Old Town cafes swell as evening falls. Most of the locals stick to coffee and cigarettes (macchiatos are a popular choice), although traditional food and booze is also served. Try the wine; the vineyards of Rahovec, Kosovo's main wine-producing region, are just 19 miles away. For a break from the meat-heavy dishes that dominate most local menus, seek out Noja Kuzhine. A homely vegetarian restaurant run by a welcoming grandma and her small team, its daily menu could include anything from a delicately spiced falafel wrap to a generous plate of pasta made with local cheese and dill. Turn in at the timber-framed Hotel Prizreni, a chalet-style property in the heart of the Old Town. For views onto cobblestone streets and the gushing river, upgrade to a balcony room. [instagram.com/noja.kuzhine](https://instagram.com/noja.kuzhine) [hotelprizreni.com](https://hotelprizreni.com)



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Below: The Patriarchate of Peć monastery in Peja has played an important part in preserving Serbian Orthodox traditions

### THREE MORE Sacred sites

#### VISOKI DEČANI MONASTERY, DEČANI

Several thousand Byzantine frescoes adorn the interior of this Serbian Orthodox monastery, depicting everything from the creation of mankind to the lineage of King Stefan Uros III, for whom this UNESCO World Heritage Site also serves as a mausoleum. Because of its religious significance, it remains heavily guarded, so you'll need a form of ID to enter.

#### PATRIARCHATE OF PEĆ MONASTERY, PEJA

Surrounded by forested hills, Peja's ruby-hued Serbian Orthodox monastery sits among a tranquil garden. Its centrepiece is a mulberry tree planted in the 13th century by Archbishop Sava II, one of many Serbian religious dignitaries interred on the property. You'll need to show your ID here, too.

#### SINAN PASHA MOSQUE, PRIZREN

Constructed from local river stone, this Old Town mosque, dating from 1615, is perhaps the most important in Prizren. Its impressive dome, minaret and colonnaded facade form a striking sight from the street, although it's also worth going inside — outside of prayer times — to see the impressively decorated interior.

## DAY TWO HISTORY & NATURE IN PEJA

### Morning

Rise early and make for the city of Peja, in the mountainous Rugova region. Its Old Bazaar, which was razed to the ground during the Kosovo War, has since been rebuilt and is worth a look. Follow your nose to the Saturday cheese market in the nearby marketplace before visiting the Museum of Peja, which is set in the restored former home of a merchant. Inside, artfully reconstructed rooms transport visitors to bygone eras. On the ground floor, displays of shimmering ceramics, local textiles and everyday items like coffee grinders and cooking pots give an intimate insight into the region. A 10-minute walk west from here, the Art Design restaurant straddles a gurgling mountain stream, making for a relaxing lunch stop. Traditional bites include meaty stuffed peppers known as *speca dollma*. [pejamuseum.org](http://pejamuseum.org)

### Afternoon

Seven miles north of Peja, the White Drin Waterfall plunges 82ft from the tip of a rocky outcrop on a mossy mountain gorge. From the modern resort at its base, follow a paved pathway through a forest to the foot of the falls, then up a steep flight of stairs to its gushing brink. On your way home, stop off in the nearby village of Radavc to peek inside Bërdynaj Mill. Thought to have been built over 300 years ago, the stone flour mill has been owned by the same family since 1925 and still relies on the river to power its hulking millstone. Back in Peja, pick up a cultural trail map from the tourist information centre opposite Hotel Dukagjini and stroll the town in search of historical relics, from a crumbling former hammam to the 16th-century Kursumli Mosque, one of the oldest buildings in the city. [facebook.com/pejaturistinfocenter](https://www.facebook.com/pejaturistinfocenter)

### Evening

Wind down with drinks at any of the convivial bars on William Walker Street. Keep it local and order a belly-warming shot of *rakia* (fruit brandy) or try a glass of Birra Peja's Crudo beer, brewed with water from the mountain spring-fed White Drin River. Wine lists tend to be dominated by bottles produced by Stone Castle Vineyards and Winery, Kosovo's largest winery, but keep an eye out for drops by boutique operations such as family-run Daka Wine. For dinner, soak up Peja's architectural heritage at the Hotel Kulla e Zenel Beut, a renovated homestead serving traditional food from its ground-floor restaurant. Characterised by beautiful masonry and narrow, arched windows, the Kulla harks back to a time when homes were built to protect occupants from enemy invasion. [kullazenelbeut.com](http://kullazenelbeut.com)







### On location

Short-film fans descend on Prizren for more than a week every August for DokuFest, Kosovo's largest film festival. It showcases more than 200 hand-picked international documentaries and short films. They're screened in cinemas and improvised venues around town, including Prizren Fortress. [dokufest.com](http://dokufest.com)

## GO FURTHER OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Prizren and Peja are ideal gateways for exploring southern Kosovo's wild and rugged landscapes. Here's where to sample the region's best outdoor pursuits – and savour its most breathtaking views

### Via ferrata

The Accursed Mountains have become a hotspot for via ferrata (climbing via a metal rail bolted into the mountain). Around Peja, you'll find four routes up Rugova Canyon. Mat, the lowest and shortest, is best for kids. Nearby, Ari and Shpellat follow the same route before splitting halfway, with the latter weaving through a series of caves to a summit around 200 metres above the canyon floor. Completed in 2021, Marimangat is Kosovo's newest and most challenging route. Often slippery due to its shady location, it takes three hours to complete. Outdoor Kosovo and Balkan Natural Adventure run guided tours and rent gear. [outdoorkosova.com](http://outdoorkosova.com) [bnadventure.com](http://bnadventure.com)

### Hiking

Rising up behind Prizren, Sharr Mountains National Park is one of Europe's newest protected wilderness areas. Infrastructure is minimal, so you'll need to contact Prizren-based Sharri Ecotour, Balkan Natural Adventure or Outdoor Kosovo to organise a guided hike among the park's alpine lakes and wildflowers. Peja, located at the gateway to the Accursed Mountains, is a more established jumping-off point for single- and multi-day hikes, including the famed Via Dinarica, which links seven countries. Day hikes include trips to Gjeravica – at 2,656 metres, Kosovo's highest mountain – and a scenic trek to a pair of turquoise lakes high above the village of Kuqishtë. [facebook.com/sharrikosovo](https://facebook.com/sharrikosovo)

### Caving

Outdoor Kosovo's Fatos Katallozi has played a pioneering role in exploring the vast limestone cave systems of the Peja region, making their surreal formations more accessible to the public in the process. His company offers tours of the cathedral-like Sleeping Beauty Cave, a web of subterranean canals a mere stone's throw from Peja's White Drin Waterfall, as well as the more challenging Great Canyon Cave in the Rugova Canyon. Caving experience isn't required for either tour, although you will need to be fit enough to undertake up to four hours of scrambling along underground river passages on the Great Canyon Cave Trekking tour.

### MORE INFO

[visit-prizren.com](http://visit-prizren.com)  
[pejatourism.org](http://pejatourism.org)  
[visitkosovo.rks-gov.net](http://visitkosovo.rks-gov.net)

### HOW TO DO IT

Wizz Air flies direct from London Luton Airport to Pristina International Airport 45 miles north of Prizren, where you can travel by hire car, taxi or bus to Pristina's bus terminal, then take a bus to Prizren (two hours). There are frequent daily buses between Pristina, Prizren and Peja. There's also at least one direct daily bus from Skopje, North Macedonia, to Prizren, which takes just over three hours. For bus schedules, visit [travel.gjirafa.com](http://travel.gjirafa.com) [wizzair.com](http://wizzair.com)

Left: Tackling the Shpellat via ferrata route in the Rugova Canyon, near Peja



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EAT

# CINCINNATI

Set on the Ohio River, the culinary culture of this Kentucky borderland city has been shaped by German settlers and farmland food, defined by plenty of beer and comfort dishes like chilli dogs and bacon-topped doughnuts

WORDS: STUART FORSTER

Among the dozens of flavoured spice rub blends arranged in tins at Colonel De Gourmet Herbs and Spices, I've singled out Ole' Bourbon Trail. It seems the ideal souvenir from this stall in Cincinnati's Findlay Market, which is set barely a mile from Ohio's border with Kentucky, America's 'bourbon state'. It's bold stuff: brown sugar and smoky paprika giving way to a burst of coriander, hickory and chilli.

Established in 1855 to sell produce from surrounding farms, Findlay Market has evolved to offer significantly more. Across the central aisle, a woman buys chicken sausages from Neil Luken Meats, fresh in from Gerber's Amish Farm, in northeast Ohio. A group of construction workers swagger past, seemingly immune to the warm, breadly wafts of baking pizza at Bouchard's. They opt instead for crimp-edged, Ukrainian dumplings filled with potato and cheddar, and spinach and provolone, at Babushka Pierogies.

An aromatic dukkah blend reminiscent of a Middle Eastern souq draws me into Dean's Mediterranean Imports, lined with glass jars of Levant spices and refrigerators packed with tubs of homemade falafel, hummus and tzatziki. I buy a wrap containing all three, plus a crunchy slaw, chunks of ripe tomato and a garlicky hot sauce. Despite the generous American portion, I still can't resist the doughy aroma coming from The Arepa Place,

which serves the titular South American ground corn patties with salsa. Filled with mozzarella cheese and then grilled, the arepa is the ultimate comfort food. I use it to scoop up the tomato-based sauce, whose potent chilli kick slowly unfurls.

"Findlay has been in operation in this location for more than 170 years," says Barb Cooper of Cincinnati Food Tours, who I've joined in the market. "There's only a handful in the United States that have been around longer."

Attracting some 10,000 visitors at weekends, Findlay Market is at the heart of the resurgent Over-the-Rhine or 'OTR' district, an area named after the now-covered canal at Cincinnati's downtown boundary. "OTR's architecture is something we treasure, built mostly between 1860 to 1890 by German immigrants," says Barb, gesturing towards pastel-painted facades above shopfronts as we tour the neighbourhood.

German heritage can be found, too, in Cincinnati's food, where butchers have long used offcuts to make an inexpensive but filling, protein-rich sausage meat called *goetta*. Pronounced 'getta', Barb explains, the delicacy is barely known beyond a 50-mile radius of the city. We call in at Ecklerlin Meats, a Findlay business established in 1852, where John Holloway introduces himself. "I'm sixth generation," he says, proudly. Holding up a brick-sized *goetta* loaf, John says he's just

Clockwise from top left: The John A Roebling Suspension Bridge spans the Ohio River between Cincinnati and the Kentucky city of Covington; the Mushrooms Run the World sandwich at Sleepy Bee Cafe; Mr Redlegs, mascot of Cincinnati Reds baseball team, at Findlay Market; a selection of iced bakes at Holtman's Donuts

IMAGES: GETTY; MACKENZIE FRANK; JEREMY KRAMER; STUART FORSTER









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pan-fried a few slices in butter. The soft texture and peppery seasoning remind me of haggis. He smiles at my approving nod.

In the 1800s, Cincinnati was America's hub for processing pork, and is still known as 'Porkopolis'. The meat is the main ingredient in *goetta*, often mixed with beef. "Back in the day, when there was a hog or cattle slaughter from farms outside town, anything that didn't have fur or bone went into your *goetta* pot," says John. "You'd add steel-cut pinhead oats, season with onion, salt, pepper and a couple of special ingredients to differentiate from your neighbour and cook it all day long, let those oats break down. Cool it overnight and that would be another meat option for the family."

Our final stop is Makers Bakers Co, where Barb introduces co-founder Kevin Foston, who encourages me to tuck into a luscious mound of banana pudding — spongy cake and sliced banana bound by cream and drizzled with a sticky bourbon-caramel sauce. Kevin recently collaborated with a brewery taproom, Samuel Adams, to create Cinnamon Roll Breakfast Bock. The German-style bock beer is dark and strong, typical of those originally brewed to give monks energy during their Lent fast, with added spice inspired by the sweet rolls.

Thanks to high demand from German settlers, brewing was once commonplace in OTR. Below its streets, vast lagering tunnels were hewn from bedrock to store fermenting beer at a cool, constant temperature for the

likes of the defunct John Kauffman Brewing Company. Today, Cincinnati is packed with critically acclaimed craft breweries. Two top venues — Rhinegeist Brewery and Northern Row Brewery and Distillery — are within easy staggering distance. But I head to Moerlein Lager House in Smale Riverfront Park, a modern microbrewery with a long history.

This riverside venue offers much beyond the giant pretzels and German sausages that may have fed its Bavarian blacksmith founder, Christian Moerlein. At a hefty wood table that wouldn't look out of place in a Munich beer hall, diners enjoy the likes of barbacoa short ribs, loaded fries and sriracha-spiced cauliflower. I order a pint of refreshing Das Über Oktoberfest-style lager and gaze at the eddying Ohio River. I'm preparing myself for a Cincinnati classic.

At a nearby branch of Skyline Chili, one of many in the city, I tuck into Cincinnati's best-known dish. Characterised by a thin sauce with hints of cinnamon and clove, this local version of chilli is far milder than the jalapeño-laced Tex-Mex iteration. "We're celebrating our 75th anniversary this year," says Skyline Chili's Sarah Sicking. "Nicholas Lambrinides opened his first Skyline with his sons in 1949, using his mother's chilli recipes. It's still a family business." The diner-style setting sees most patrons eat and leave within 20 minutes. Complimentary oyster crackers arrive seconds after I've ordered. On surrounding tables,

## A TASTE OF Cincinnati



### JEFF RUBY'S STEAKHOUSE

The crystal chandeliers and mother-of-pearl baby grand are an ideal backdrop for a 'cowboy steak' (22oz, bone-in ribeye) or Wagyu filet mignon. Oysters, sushi and dover sole also feature on a menu whose sides include lobster gnocchi. Steaks from \$62 (£49). [jeffruby.com](http://jeffruby.com)

### METROPOLE ON WALNUT

Ingredients sourced from Ohio's farmers, distilleries and wineries feature on a bistro-style menu. Served with smoked aioli and pepper jack cheese, the smash burger pairs well with a glass of Kentucky bourbon. Mains from around \$18 (£14). [metropoleonwalnut.com](http://metropoleonwalnut.com)

### BOCA

This is fine dining from a native chef, David Falk. The menu of steaks, seafood, house-made pasta and seasonal sides features dishes such as scallops with caramelised brussels sprouts, while desserts include the chocolate and nougat 'candy bar 3.0'. Falk's basement spot, Sotto, offers a rustic Italian experience. Mains from \$22 (£17). [bocacincinnati.com](http://bocacincinnati.com)

### SLEEPY BEE CAFE

Colourful glass art installations celebrate the importance of the pollinating insects that lend this casual restaurant its name, inspiring a menu that's big on locally sourced ingredients. Egg scrambles, granola and original and vegan versions of *goetta* feature alongside gluten-free options such as 'bee cakes' pancakes. Breakfasts from around \$7.50 (£6). [sleepybeecafe.com](http://sleepybeecafe.com)



Right: Market Wines in Findlay Market  
Below: Goetta and hashed potatoes



## FIVE FOOD FINDS

1

### CININNATI CHILLI

Distinctively spiced with cinnamon, allspice and cloves, Cincinnati's mild chilli has been served with a hot dog or spaghetti since the 1920s.

2

### GOETTA

Typically served as a breakfast option or snack, this heavily seasoned local meat and oat sausage began as an affordable source of protein for German immigrants.

3

### GRAETER'S ICE CREAM

Louis Graeter started selling ice cream on Cincinnati's streets in 1870. It's still made in spinning 'French pot' freezers, with established and seasonal flavours available in 18 citywide stores.

4

### GRIPPO'S CHIPS

Family-run Grippo's has been making preservative-free, salty snacks for over a century, starting with pretzels in 1919. The zingy 'Bar-B-Q' flavour and beef jerky are firm favourites.

5

### HOLTMAN'S DONUTS

Famed for bacon-topped yeast doughnuts with maple icing, Holtman's has four very popular stores which close when supplies are exhausted. Expect queues.



people dig into cheese coneys: hot dogs in steamed buns served with chopped onions and chilli, and almost buried in grated cheese. Others order their chilli with spaghetti using what sounds like a secret code.

"A three-way is spaghetti with chilli and cheese," explains Sarah. "A four-way adds onions or beans, and five-way adds both." Asking for the dish to be inverted puts the cheese at the bottom and spaghetti on top. At under \$10 (£8), a regular-sized three-way is an inexpensive way of filling up while experiencing some unique local culinary heritage.

It's hearty stuff, so I take a digestive evening stroll — into the next state. This actually takes just minutes, crossing the Ohio River via the John A Roebling Bridge to arrive in Covington, Kentucky. While a city in its own right, it has the feel of a well-to-do suburb, and is considered part of metropolitan Cincinnati, even playing host to its international airport.

Here, at Revival Vintage Bottle Shop, I find shelves lined with bottles more akin to museum objects than standard off-licence wares. I spot a 2016 bottle of Old Rip Van Winkle bourbon with a price tag of \$999.99 (£792). A 1950 bottle of Old Wilmore costs \$899.99 (£713). There are also dozens with double-figure prices, displaying labels with retro fonts and antiquated designs.

"I think the best spirits have already been made," says co-founder Brad Bonds, who seeks out old bottles from collectors, and those idling in attics across the US. If the

original seals are intact, he'll buy anything from bourbon, rye and other types of whiskey, with the occasional foray into other spirits including rums and tequilas. "One man's trash is another's treasure," says Brad, who opens a 'new' bottle every day, allowing customers to sample a \$5 (£4) pour of a spirit that may have been distilled before they were born.

Ordering a sample of 1983 Kentucky Tavern bourbon, I sit at one of the four leather-topped stools by the bar and swirl the golden liquid around the glass. As a relative newcomer to bourbon, I can't identify the characteristics that warrant buying a bottle from my birth year. But at least I can try it.

A 10-minute taxi ride back to OTR brings more vintage fun. Here, I descend to Ghost Baby, a nightclub set in a 170-year-old lagering tunnel, where I'm shown to a booth lit by a tasselled lamp to watch a jazz trumpeter play a muted melody. The scene reminds me of a classic film, prompting the order of an old fashioned. The cocktail's barrel-proof bourbon warms my chest and causes me to exhale rapidly — an experience, I'm told, that's known locally as a 'Kentucky hug'. It's a fitting farewell to this borderlands city.

**HOW TO DO IT:** America As You Like It offers a 14-night Sips, Sights and Sounds of Kentucky self-drive tour that includes time in Cincinnati. From £1,905 per person including flights, hotels and car hire. [americaasyoulikeit.com](http://americaasyoulikeit.com)

**MORE INFO:** [visitcincy.com](http://visitcincy.com) [meetnky.com](http://meetnky.com)





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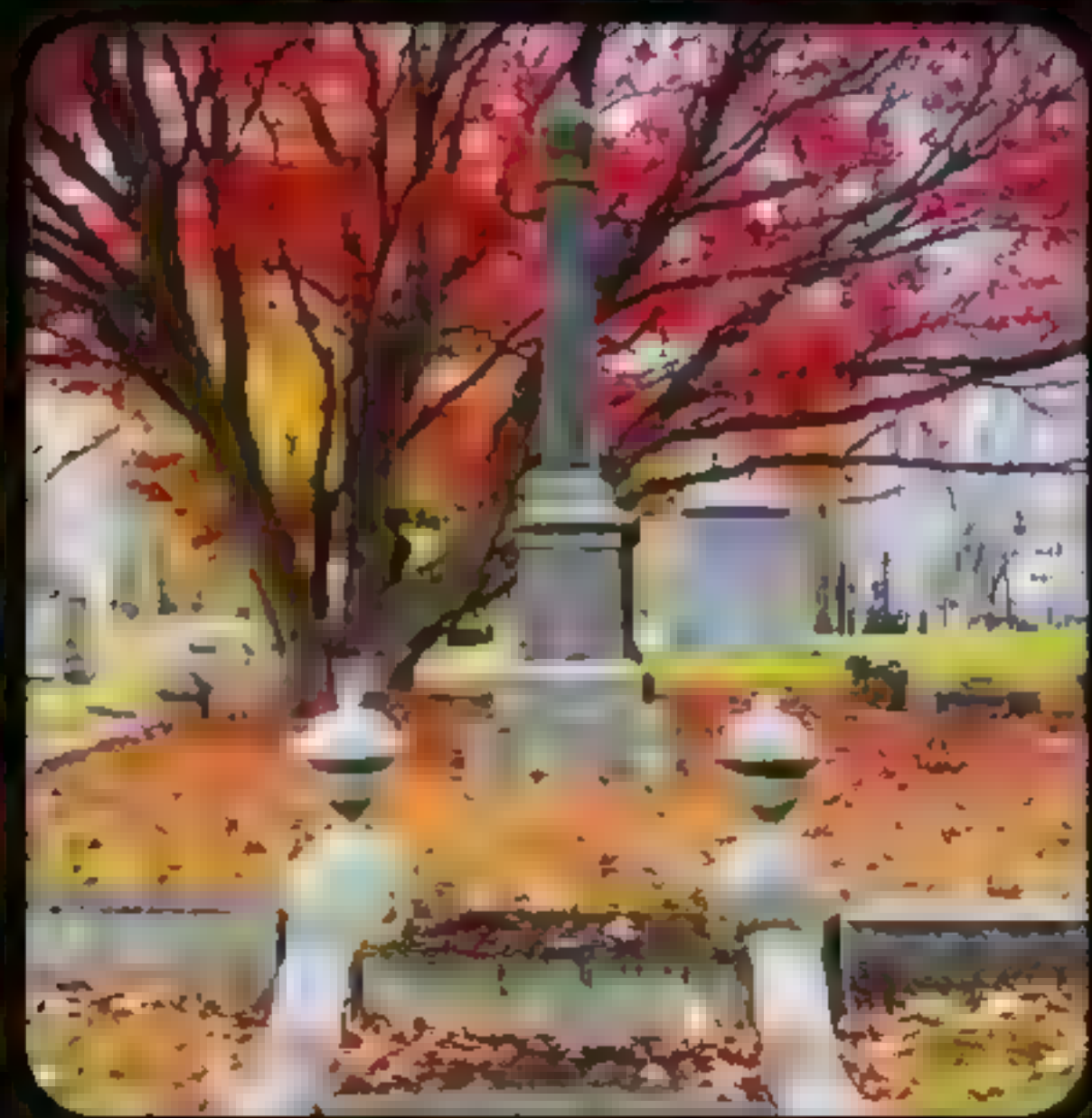
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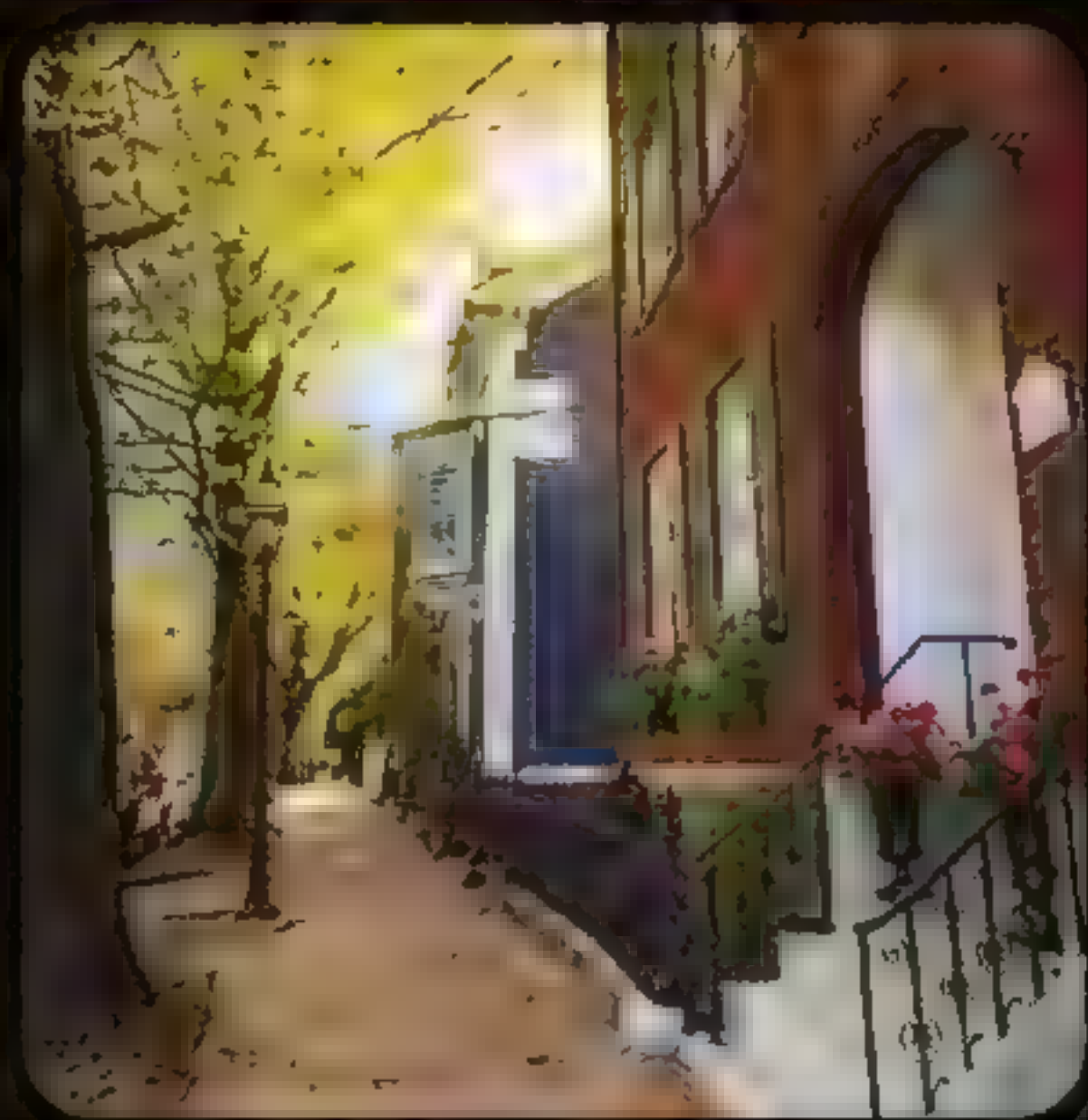
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SLEEP

# VIENNA



It's no wonder Vienna wins titles for liveability — the Austrian capital fits imperial-scale cultural riches within its compact city limits, and yet vineyards and wooded hills are just a 15-minute metro ride away. Baroque mansions crowd the historic core around the cathedral and girdling the old town is the Ringstrasse, a sequence of grand avenues, home to palaces, art galleries and concert halls. Vienna's other districts are no less desirable, with quirky museums and beloved local coffee houses. Wherever you stay, you're likely to see Viennese character in the look of your lodgings — the city offers plenty of material for imaginative hotel designers to work with.

WORDS: RORY GOULDING

ALL RATES QUOTED ARE FOR STANDARD DOUBLES, ROOM-ONLY, UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED. IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; HOTEL SACHER





## Best for living heritage

### €€€ HOTEL SACHER

Forget Waldorf salad — for a hotel namesake dish, it's hard to beat the chocolate-and-apricot cake served at the Sacher since it opened in 1876. Hotel guests get to skip the queues at the two on-site cafes where the Sacher-Torte is still made to its original 34-step recipe. The city's only family-run luxury hotel also offers a generous slice of Viennese history in its interiors and setting, neighbouring the opera house on the Ringstrasse. Musically named suites and classically elegant rooms make only slightly less imperial use of the chandeliers and velvety wallpaper that grace the public spaces, including the Blue Bar, and Red and Green restaurants. The Marble Hall's bountiful breakfast buffet includes a cake corner. For all the grandeur, though, the hotel's many nooks mean it can still feel surprisingly intimate.

**ROOMS:** From €590 (£505). [sacher.com](https://www.sacher.com)





## SLEEP

### Best for weekend brunch

#### ££ HOTEL MOTTO

After years building a restaurant group focused on Austrian cuisine, Motto's Francophile owner wanted to bring a bit of Parisian spirit to his first hotel venture. There are chandeliers and sofas rehomed from the Paris Ritz and tasselled touches of the boudoir in the 91 bedrooms. The street-level bakery masters both French and Austrian pastries, while wiener schnitzel rubs shoulders with coq au vin on the menu at top-floor Chez Bernard, set at the corner of the 1870s building, under a striking new lattice roof. The restaurant is particularly popular for its a la carte breakfast and brunch on weekends, for which hotel guests should book ahead. There are local touches, too, such as in the custom bathroom tiles and toiletries from the city's Saint Charles Apothecary brand. A couple of rooms have balconies right above Mariahilfer Strasse, Vienna's major shopping street.

**ROOMS:** From €160 (£140). [hotelmotto.at](http://hotelmotto.at)

### Best for cocktail fans

#### ££ DIE JOSEFINE HOTEL

Opened in 2021, this is the latest incarnation for a typically tall and narrow Viennese *zinshaus* (apartment block) that has hosted a series of hotels since the 1920s. Its design has been reset back to the jazz era style of its first ancestor, and the 49 rooms and two split-level suites are kitted out with art deco mirrors and plush, scallop-shelled armchairs. By the entrance, the 'Phonothek' lounge holds around 3,000 records, covering classic jazz and many other genres, which guests can pick out to play on the turntable by the honesty bar. Downstairs is the velvet-draped Barfly's Club, which opened in 1990 under a previous incumbent and has built a strong local reputation thanks to its speakeasy vibe, signature rum cocktails and library of hundreds of rare whiskies.

**ROOMS:** From €170 (£145), B&B. [hoteljosefine.at](http://hoteljosefine.at)

### Best for quirky design

#### £££ THE LEO GRAND

The restoration of this baroque building just yards from the Stephansdom Cathedral was a challenging one, but the owners still found time to have some fun. The style draws on Viennese life and politics in the era of Emperor Leopold I (1640–1705), so as well as salvaged roof timbers in some of the bedrooms, best of all in the split-level Leopold Suite, you'll find headboards inspired by the shape of the namesake ruler's notoriously jutting 'Habsburg lip'. The era's fondness for royal menageries is translated into bedside lamps with monkey supports and feathered shades, and fanciful murals in the lobby. In the central courtyard — under a canopy that opens and shuts — is a restaurant serving sushi platters with Asian-Austrian fusion flourishes.

**ROOMS:** From €350 (£300). [theleogrand.com](http://theleogrand.com)







The courtyard restaurant at The Leo Grand  
Left from top: 1920s stained glass windows  
at Die Josefine Hotel; schelterhaufen  
(apple pudding) at Hotel Motto



# HEIDI HORTEN COLLECTION

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**Best for film-star looks**

**📍 HOTEL TOPAZZ LAMEE**

This hotel is separated into two distinct yet complementary halves on either side of a central old town street. The Topazz is a new build from 2012, inspired by the Wiener Werkstätte, a local craft movement that was a forerunner to art deco. The style is reflected in the bedrooms' large, oval windows. In a 1930s building across the road, the Lamee has touches of that era's Hollywood glamour — it was part-named for Austrian-American film star Hedy Lamarr — with patterned-ebony wall panels and bold floral carpets. Every guest gets a bottle of wine from the hotel's own organic winery within Vienna's city limits. **ROOMS:** From €230 (£200). [hoteltopazzlamee.com](http://hoteltopazzlamee.com)



**Best for a peaceful haven**

**📍 HOTEL INDIGO VIENNA NASCHMARKT**

A short walk from the food stalls of the Naschmarkt, the Indigo shields itself from city hubbub with a little help from its neighbours. A tall but narrow entrance building — home to 21 of the 158 rooms — leads to the inner gardens of a large residential block. Here, the main part of the hotel spreads out around a sunken courtyard. Lounge areas are filled with mid-century-style furniture while, in the rooms, Wiener Geflecht (Vienna's characteristic rattan weave) makes an appearance in the furniture and the rug patterns. **ROOMS:** From €129 (£110). [ihg.com/hotelindigo](http://ihg.com/hotelindigo)

**Best for socialising**

**📍 JO&JOE VIENNA**

An IKEA store has the first four floors of the building next to the Westbahnhof station, while five and six belong to JO&JOE. The globe-trotting hostel group has brought a few Alpine apres-ski touches to Vienna, with ski lift chairs in the lobby-lounge and a giant, dirndl-clad Lego figure by the bar. Private rooms and dorms sleeping four to 12 feature wood-framed beds in raw concrete spaces softened with spray-painted cityscapes. There are weekly karaoke and salsa nights and a roof terrace hosting a bar in summer. **ROOMS:** From €80 (£70). [joandjoe.com](http://joandjoe.com)

**Best for families**

**📍 HENRIETTE CITY HOTEL**

Breakfast sets the tone at Henriette: certified organic products, homemade cakes and granolas and honey from the rooftop hives. The hotel is in a nondescript former apartment block, with a makeover planned, but there's individuality in the 72 rooms, such as the specially commissioned photo prints of Vienna. Families will appreciate the adjoining room options and availability of travel cots. The hotel is in quiet Leopoldstadt, two stops on the metro from the old town, and near the famous Prater amusement park. **ROOMS:** From €115 (£100), B&B. [hotelhenriette.at](http://hotelhenriette.at)

IMAGE: LENIKUS KLAUS VYHNALEK





From top: A bedroom on the Secession-themed floor at Hotel Beethoven, dedicated to architect Frederick Kiesler; the lobby-bar at Ruby Lissi Hotel & Bar



## Best for music-lovers

### ££ HOTEL BEETHOVEN

Well located between Ringstrasse museums and Naschmarkt snack options, the Hotel Beethoven faces the theatre where its namesake composed his only opera around 1804. The corner townhouse has rooms across six floors, each with its own Viennese theme, from coffeehouse culture to strong women of the fin de siècle. The rooms are named for different historic figures and phenomena, and decorated with plenty of individuality; you might find a boldly graphic poster from the Secession movement — Vienna's take on art nouveau — paired with a chair in the homely Biedermeier style from earlier in the 19th century. Below the guest rooms is a cocktail bar and, adjoining the breakfast buffet, a salon for complimentary afternoon coffee, tea and cake, with a grand piano for chamber music concerts every Sunday.

**ROOMS:** From €145 (£125), B&B.  
[hotel-beethoven.at](http://hotel-beethoven.at)

## Best for globe-trotters

### £ RUBY LISSI HOTEL & BAR

A fantastical departures board hangs in the lobby-bar, promising trips to Atlantis and Outer Space. Mosaic shelves of vintage suitcases and telephones continue the theme of travellers past. This solidly set 19th-century building on the edge of the old town has 127 bedrooms in a more sparing style than the lobby, but with classic touches in the cherry wood panelling and button-tufted headboards. One surprising perk is the acoustic or electric guitars you can borrow for your own jam session. There are two other 'Rubies' in town, differently styled, east and west of the centre.

**ROOMS:** From €135 (£115). [ruby-hotels.com](http://ruby-hotels.com)

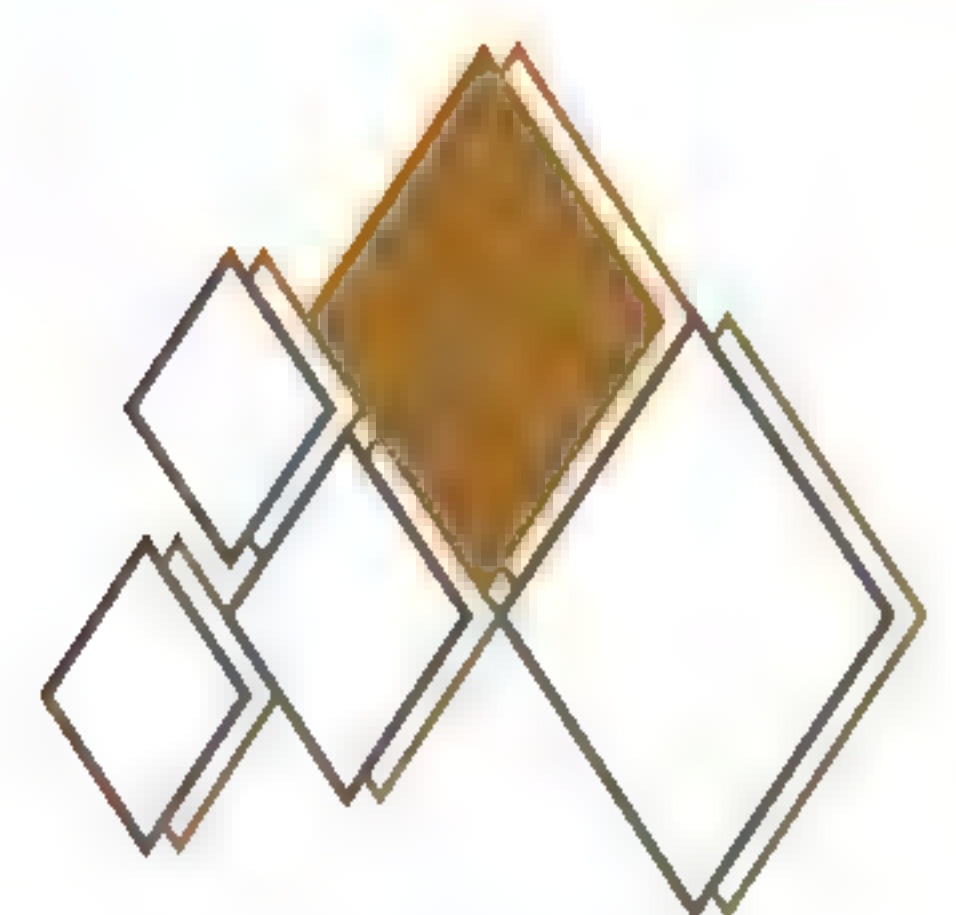


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# ISLANDS



WORDS: JULIA BUCKLEY, DANA FACAROS, ANGELA LOCATELLI, ANASTASIA MIARI & HANNAH SUMMERS

# GREEK

From the gastronomic isles of the Cyclades to the enigmatic ruins of the Dodecanese, each of the six main Greek island groups has its own distinct character. Choose your own adventure and discover them yourself







# TRAVEL



In the southeast Aegean, farthest from the mainland and often in sight of the Turkish coast, the Dodecanese only joined Greece in 1947 after decades of occupation. It's this turbulent history that has given these islands their striking individualism — and what sets their culture and architecture apart

## WALK ON A VOLCANO

### NISYROS

According to Greek mythology, it was Poseidon who seized a chunk of Kos and hurled it on top of a fiery Titan called Polyvotis — creating the volcanic island of Nisyros, with its enormous, sulphurous caldera. The volcano is active, but travellers can still walk across its warm crust — it last erupted in 1888 and is carefully monitored. It can be visited on a day trip from nearby Kos, but it's worth sticking around to explore the island's little capital, Mandraki, with its colourful houses and Byzantine churches; the nearby thermal spring at Loutra; and the lofty village of Emporios, with its ruined Byzantine castle, natural cave sauna and mesmerising views over the caldera. [nisyrosgeopark.gr](http://nisyrosgeopark.gr)

## WANDER A GHOST VILLAGE

### TILOS

For centuries, the residents of Tilos built their homes inland, safe from marauders. But in the 1950s, when the villagers of Mikro Chorio found their wells running dry, they decided to relocate to the island's port area — taking their roofs, doors and windows with them. Until recently, the only signs that Mikro Chorio ever existed were the whitewashed church and fawn-coloured stone walls, which snake over the hillside and act as a playground for goats. Now, though, one ruined home has been renovated and turned into an atmospheric summer bar. From 11pm when it opens, a shuttle bus runs here from nearby Livadia — and the sound of chatter and clinking glasses once again fills this ghostly village.

## REACH NEW HEIGHTS

### KALYMNOS

For a long time, the island of Kalymnos was famous for one thing: sponge-diving. But in 1996, a new focus emerged, when Italian rock climber Andrea di Bari, on holiday with his family, observed the island's towering limestone cliffs. Before long, this isle emerged as a capital for climbing. Kalymnos now has over 4,000 routes for all abilities, and companies such as Climb in Kalymnos offer dedicated beginners' courses. But it's not all about sports here, as the island has retained its old-world charm. Wander the ruins of the Byzantine town of Kastro, high on the mountainside, or head east to Vathys and its fjord-like valley, flanked by fragrant citrus groves. [climbinkalymnos.com](http://climbinkalymnos.com)



EXPLORE A WOODLAND OASIS

RHODES

The island of Rhodes is best known for two historic sites — walled Old Rhodes Town, built by the crusading Knights of St John; and Lindos, a pretty 15th-century sea captains’ town set beneath an ancient, vertigo-inducing acropolis. But it’s also popular for its broad, sandy beaches, and the fact it receives over 300 days of sunshine each year. If you can tear yourself away from the sea, visit Seven Springs, a refreshing woodland oasis in the north east of the island, reached by wading through a dark, 180m-long irrigation tunnel. The effort is worth it: refreshing swims, a tall waterfall and pine-shaded hiking trails await, and there’s a taverna frequented by roaming peacocks. [7springs.gr](#)

PEDAL THE ‘BICYCLE ISLAND’

KOS

Greece’s ‘bicycle island’, Kos has over 6,500 bikes to hire and is also crisscrossed with cycling trails, including a new eight-mile path that takes in the coast. When Kos’s Italian colonisers departed in 1943, they left their bikes behind, which were swiftly adopted by the locals. One of the best sights to explore by bike are the ruins of Asklepion, two miles outside Kos Town and easy to reach on two wheels. In 430BC, Kos native Hippocrates, the ‘Founder of Medicine’, created this healing sanctuary, which is arranged in terraces along the hillside. But you don’t have to be a keen cyclist to enjoy Kos — the island is also generously endowed with sandy beaches, and Kos Town is known for its crusader, Ottoman and Italian architecture set beneath clouds of fuchsia bougainvillea. [idealrentals.eu](#)

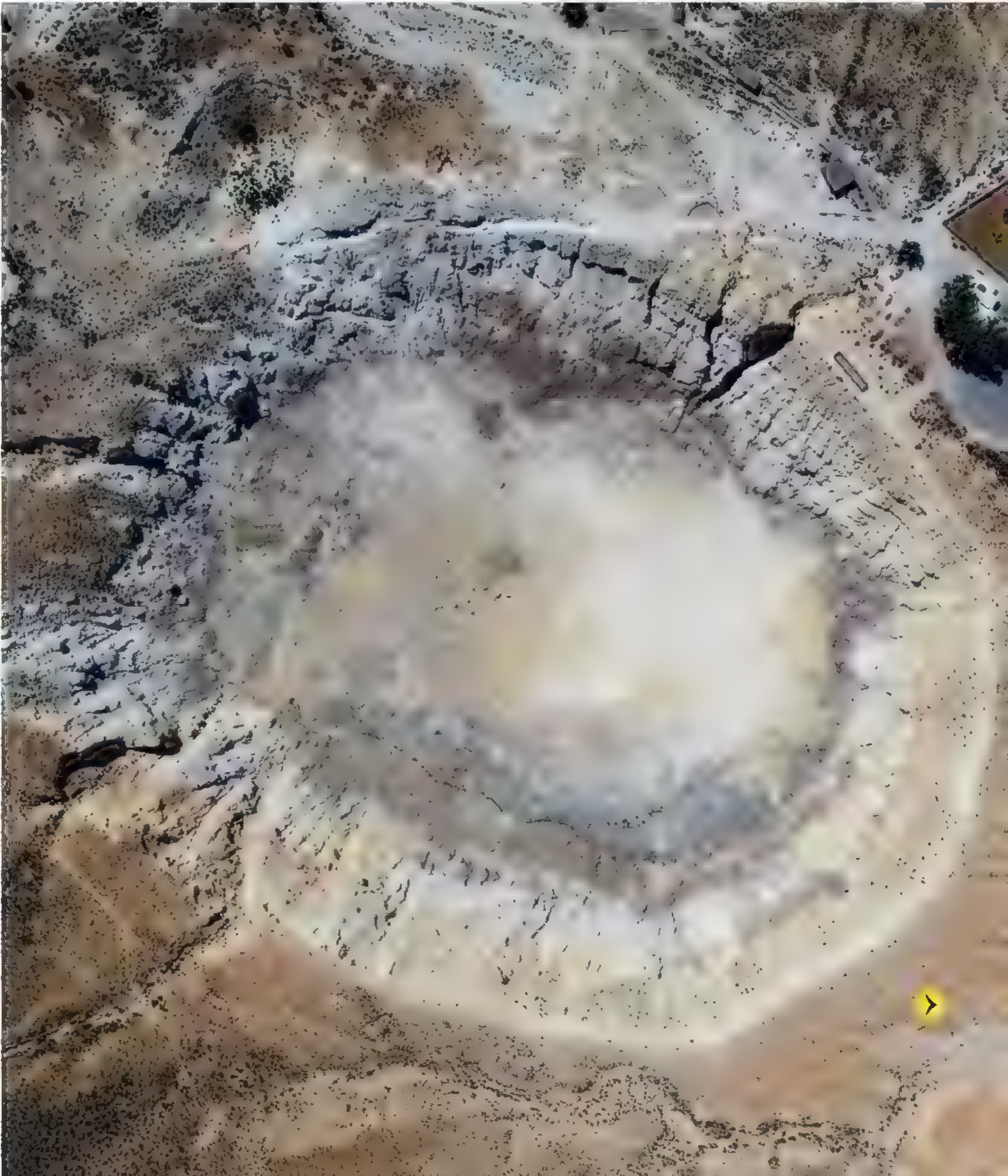
TRAVEL THROUGH TIME

KARPATHOS

One of the Dodecanese’s highest mountains effectively divides Karpathos in two. At the island’s northern end, the remote hamlet of Olympos was isolated until 1979, when a road was built through the wild terrain. Local women still wear flowery scarves and long skirts — plus enormous necklaces of gold coins on special occasions — and they keep to many traditional ways, baking bread in communal ovens and embroidering textiles. Stay overnight here, in a cosy apartment at Irene’s House or Olympos Archipelagos, with its sea views, to get a feel for Olympos’s old-world magic, and don’t miss a traditional *laouto* (lute) performance in the taverna. [ireneshouse.com](#) [archipelagoskarpathos.com](#) **DANA FACAROS**



Boats moored off Stegna Beach on the east coast of Rhodes. From left: Kalymnos is the centre of rock climbing in the Greek islands; travellers can walk across







EYEWITNESS

# FORGOTTEN PATHS

**Walking the old donkey trails on Symi lets travellers discover the forested interior of this small Dodecanese island – and meet its resilient, resourceful locals. Words: Angela Locatelli**

“Ela!” says Valantis Makrakis with a huff, mid-step, one hand clutching his side, the other lifted in greeting. A young man nods back as he trots down the sloping street, followed by a litter of cats. “Kalimeri!” Valantis says again to a woman, who answers with a pat on his back before overtaking us on the uphill climb. He turns to me and smiles broadly, his eyebrows, which are dark like his eyes, forming little beads of sweat. “I know everyone here.”

Valantis is showing me around the pint-sized island of Symi. Raised on these shores, he works in the management office at Nireus, a hotel in the only town, also called Symi. Neoclassical houses hug its theatre-like bay, painted ochre and russet with splashes of blue. This architecture is Symi’s calling card — the first thing visitors notice on inbound ferries, and the image they’ll likely take away on postcards. But I’m here to hike and, as it turns out, opportunities start right in the centre of town.

In the island’s north, Symi town is split into seafront Gialos, the harbour, with all the restaurants and shops to welcome day-trippers from nearby Rhodes, and hillside Chorio — older and residential. Connecting the two is the Kali Strata, the street of some 400 steps we’re navigating.

Valantis pauses to catch his breath, and I take in my surroundings. The details of the houses, lining the street on both sides, come into focus: the window cases painted white, the skylights on the gables. And, in between these manicured facades, ruins. The town was bombed to near-destruction in the Second World War, and the population never quite recovered from the subsequent exodus: of the 22,000 residents who lived here, some 3,000 remain.

“I like having friends everywhere, helping them,” says Valantis of the tight-knit community that emerged from the dust. “We have one doctor, there are only two passenger ferries a week in winter. It can be a difficult island.” Locals have learned to rely on themselves, adds Valantis, who is also trained in first aid and the leader of the young scouts.

This pride in one’s mettle must come in handy, I think, breathless, as we emerge from the Kali Strata into Chorio, then continue higher still along its quiet alleys. The town’s restoration since the war is being handled house by house, by private owners, and the damage is more evident in these backstreets. We reach the Kastro, the remnants of a 14th-century fortress — now little more than a viewpoint. From here, Symi’s broad bay spreads wider far below. The warm





breeze washes over the shrubland; the soil, tinted by red clay, is reflected in the turquoise of the Aegean.

Valantis suggests a shortcut back to Gialos: a centuries-old path a few streets down from the Kastro, levelled by the passage of heels — and hooves. “Donkeys used to carry loads up this road,” he says, “but now we have bikes, cars.” I picture the pack train, clip-clopping slow and sure over uneven stones. Today, we’re alone on the way down.

Donkey trails like this have fallen into disuse all around Symi. That afternoon, we drive to the west shore to find another one next to the 18th-century monastery of Megalos Sotiris. Once abandoned, it’s being brought back to life by Manolis Petridis, a former waiter who took on the repairs as a project. He shows us around in a paint-stained workman’s suit as tinny Greek pop plays from his radio, hung on a nail on the wall. “He had no idea how to do this,” says Valantis, gesturing to beautifully restored pebble mosaics and stone arches. “But if you want to do it, you’ll find a way.”

That seems to be true of many things on Symi. We leave the monastery and join the path outside — a dirt road through the forested interior. There are no signposts other than marks on stones, and with no trail maps available, travellers may never even know these paths exist. A hiking enthusiast, Valantis has been tracing them with his smart watch, hoping to one day help create better access.

“I like following these ways like the old Symians,” he says. This was once the link between Symi town and the monastery in Panormitis, to the south. Donkeys walked it carrying materials, the faithful took it — a steep, difficult route — to demonstrate their devotion. When a road the length of the island was paved in the 1960s, it shortened the pilgrimage from four hours to 30 minutes. “I still hike sometimes,” says Valantis. “If I have a vow — a big one.”

We reach Panormitis driving along that paved road. The settlement — essentially one seaside street — centres around the Holy Monastery of the Archangel Michael, whose white facade takes pride of place on the coast. Crowds swell with the arrival of day-tripper ferries, which stop right by the complex. We’re alone as we enter the frescoed, single-aisle church, but the quiet doesn’t last.

A ferry must have moored. A queue of visitors arrives, walking in hushed procession. They take turns to kiss a silver-plated figure of the Archangel Michael, based on an icon that — according to local tradition — miraculously appeared on the spot where the complex now stands, centuries ago. It’s still housed inside, making this one of the most revered places in the Dodecanese.

The devotees aren’t the sole testament to the monastery’s might. At the far end of the complex, a small museum of religious artefacts displays wooden boxes, messages in bottles, reproductions of mighty vessels and humbler single-mast ships, one crusted in seashells — offerings, Valantis says, that washed up on the island.

We discuss the finds at Panormitis’s only cafe, whose owner, Mihalīs Tsauselis, doubles as Symi’s deputy mayor. “I found one, too — a message in a bottle, asking whoever came upon it to light three candles here,” says Valantis, sipping his coffee. “There have been many miracles here.” He opens his eyes wide, nodding vigorously, as if I wouldn’t believe him. No matter, I think. On this tough little island of rubble and resurrection, it seems the community can make its own miracles — and that is a blessing in itself.

Above from left:  
Morning beside  
the harbour on Symi;  
the Holy Monastery of  
the Archangel Michael  
in Panormitis

**HOW TO DO IT:** Sunvil offers seven nights at the Nireus Hotel from £1,129 per person, B&B, including flights from Gatwick and transfers from Rhodes. [sunvil.co.uk](https://sunvil.co.uk)





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# IONIAN ISLANDS



Best known for their cypresses and olive groves reminiscent of Italy, the Ionian islands, scattered off the west coast of the mainland, were ruled by Venice for centuries. Only Corfu was spared the 1953 earthquake that flattened the towns here, meaning historical sights are relatively few and far between, but the exquisite beaches, hiking trails and Italian-influenced cuisine more than compensate

## SET SAIL FOR THE ISLETS

### LEFKADA

Mountainous, wooded Lefkada, with its craggy coast, was a late-comer to tourism, so it can feel more authentically Greek than some of the most popular isles. And for those dreaming of sailing the islands, its port of Nydri is the best place to start: sheltered from winds, its bay is scalloped with secluded coves and its own archipelago of emerald islets. You can hire anything from a licence-free dinghy up to a large sailing yacht here, with which you can explore the secret inlets. [ionianboats.com](http://ionianboats.com) [skorpioscharter.com](http://skorpioscharter.com)

## HEAD FOR THE HILLS

### CORFU

With its Venetian-style capital and sandy beaches, Corfu is one of Greece's most-visited islands. It's worth heading for the hills here. Old Perithia, the island's highest village, was founded in the 14th century, but by the 1950s its inhabitants had left, leaving only a taverna for hikers. In 2010, a couple from the UK fell in love with the village, buying a property (now a boutique B&B) and kicking off its slow restoration. Today, it's a riot of wildflowers in spring. [old-perithia.com](http://old-perithia.com) [themerchantshousecorfu.com](http://themerchantshousecorfu.com)

## SEE THE BLUE CAVES

### ZAKYNTHOS

This is an island of white-sand beaches, but its north coast, with sheer cliffs rising out of the sea, is truly spectacular. The best-known precipices surround 'Shipwreck Beach', where a rusting cargo ship rests, slowly sinking into sands — though it's currently only accessible to view from afar due to the risk of landslides. Other cliffs help form the Blue Caves, a labyrinth of pale rock that reflects the shimmering electric blue of the waters. Boats can enter the largest cave, where you can dive in for full immersion. [potamitisbros.gr](http://potamitisbros.gr)

## KAYAK SECRET COVES

### KEFALONIA

The biggest Ionian island, mountainous and green like a vast turtle's shell, is surrounded by cliffs and coves — including the deep blue Melissani Cave on the east coast — and many of them are only accessible from the sea. In a kayak, you can paddle between the beaches at leisure, or embark on a longer guided trip, staying in inns on the way. For a challenge of a different kind, drive 1,628m up Mount Ainos, the highest peak in the area, for an eagle's-eye view of the Ionians. [seakayakingkefalonia-greece.com](http://seakayakingkefalonia-greece.com) **DF**



EYEWITNESS

# INTO THE BLUE

**Pint-sized Paxos, south of Corfu, can be circled in a few hours by boat. Perfect for beach-hopping, it brings some of Greece's most secluded coves within reach. Words: Hannah Summers**

Leaning over the edge of the boat, I sink my hands below the surface. The midday sun is reflecting on the crests of the waves, and I can hear the hypnotic lapping of the sea meeting the cliffs. Otherwise, all is quiet.

"It's the *San Sebastian*!" the skipper, George, suddenly shouts, pointing at a colourful wooden vessel that's swaying on the water some 20 metres further out. "That was my grandfather's boat. I was eight years old when we took a woman in labour to hospital in it. But we stopped using boats as ambulances in the 1970s," he says, with a smile. He nudges the throttle, leaving the ship in our wake.

It's not surprising to hear that on Paxos, a seven-mile by two-and-a-half mile island off the south coast of Corfu, boats, just like the one George Lychnos remembers, were once used for everything from furniture removal to emergency services. While the road network has improved over recent decades — you can now drive the length of Paxos in just 20 minutes — the steep, winding route of the asphalt still reduces even the most laissez-faire drivers to sweat.

But boating around Paxos is as much about fun as it is practicality. Summer days on this Ionian island are mostly spent dropping anchor at whichever cove of clear water takes your fancy, stretching out beneath the sun on the deck and diving in to cool off. Renting boats like this, whether solo or with a skipper, is something you can do on smaller stretches of some other Greek islands, but the size of Paxos means you can circle it at a leisurely pace in three hours. The abundance of beaches ("over 50, below 100," says George) also gives you the chance to beach-hop between many of Greece's most beautiful coves in a day.

We leave the 100-year-old *San Sebastian* in the distance, speeding around the island alongside hillsides covered in a green patchwork of towering pines and low, wide trees, their branches heavy with olives. "Paxos is covered in olive trees," says George over the roar of the motor. "There are around 500,000 of them. But in summer, they're too hard to pick — just look at those hills! We can't be bothered."

George is the owner of Villa Kiki near the capital Gaios, on the southeast coast, where tavernas serve souvlaki in Venetian buildings with peeling shutters. The next day, George takes me on a tour of the island, again by boat.

Skimming across the water clockwise along the island's east coast, we pass modest cottages with sea views and modern homes worthy of *Grand Designs* — glassy structures that blend in with the surrounding forest. Soon, we're coasting beside the holiday home of the Agnelli family, owners of Juventus football club. A lone man plucks clams from the rocks beside it.

Close to here, in the harbour of Mongonissi village on the island's southern tip, we speed past sailing boats and superyachts, and a jack russell bounding into the shallows to fetch his ball. A short while later, we stop at Erimitis beach, where the neon-blue sea meets creamy pebbles, and the cliffs slowly shift to rose-gold with the sunset.

The next day, I hop in my hire car to explore the northern tip of the island and another harbour town, Lakka, where I arrive to find the yachties heading in from their sailboats. It's here that I meet 25-year-old Kostas Pappas, who, with his floppy hair and gentle manner, has become one of the most sought-after sea captains on the island.

I join him on one of his rigid inflatable boats. Handing me a glass of chilled rosé, he heads for some of his favourite swimming spots — each one empty but for us. At Avlaki 2 beach, which is barely wide enough for a couple of towels, I dive in and float on my back. Nothing beats entering the water from a boat: it's exhilarating at first, then serene. At Lakkos beach, in the north, the pebbled shore is lined with olive and cypress trees, no other boats in sight.

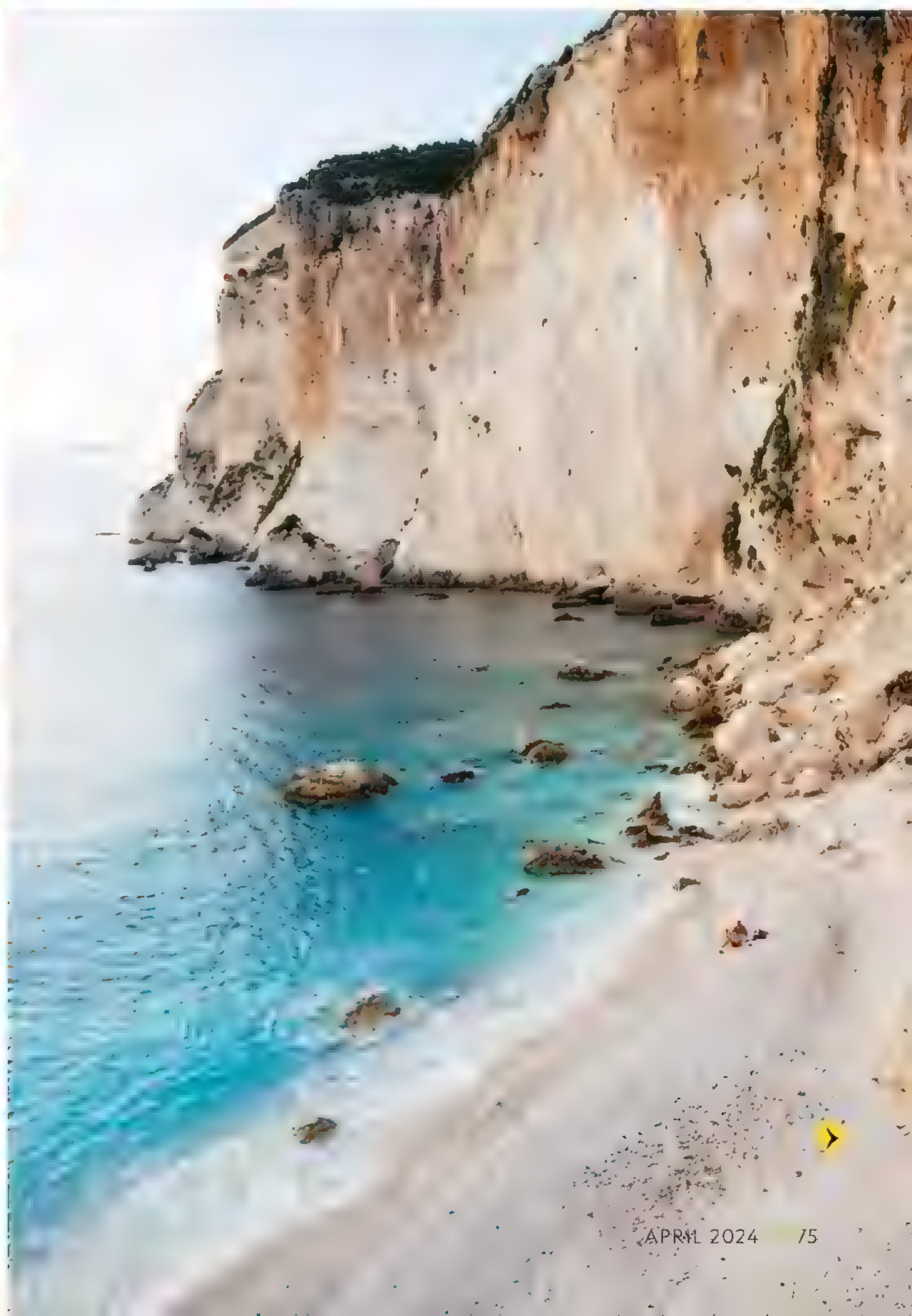
Back at Villa Kiki that evening, I ask George what he plans to do over winter, when the travellers have left and the boats are empty. "Maybe then we'll pick our olives," he says, with a smile. "Picking olives on Paxos is like going to the therapist for a session. It makes you feel good." He may be right. But I'd say any time here on Paxos is good for me.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Jet2 flies from numerous UK airports to Corfu, with an average flight time of three hours. From Corfu, ferries take one to two hours to make the crossing to Paxos. [jet2.com](http://jet2.com) [joycruises.gr](http://joycruises.gr). Doubles at Grecotel Corfu Imperial from £210, B&B. Apartment for four at Villa Kiki, Paxos, from around £185, room only. [corfuimperial.com](http://corfuimperial.com) [airbnb.com](http://airbnb.com)  
**MORE INFO:** [panosboatsandtrips.com](http://panosboatsandtrips.com) [pappasboatsandcruises.com](http://pappasboatsandcruises.com)

Clockwise from top left: A statue at the entrance to Gaios harbour; the capital Gaios, on the southeast coast; Erimitis Beach; a taverna serving traditional souvlaki

IMAGES: AWL IMAGES; GETTY









The North Aegean islands, off the west coast of Turkey, comprise Greece's northernmost group, reaching as far as the mainland towards Thessaloniki. Due to their remoteness, many travellers tend to overlook them in favour of their neighbours to the south, the Dodecanese and Cyclades — meaning this is a lesser-visited archipelago that's largely retained its local character

Above, from left:  
Lemnos has colourful  
harbours — and Greece's  
only desert; Lesbos  
is famous for ouzo, the  
anise-flavoured spirit

MEET THE GREAT GODS

## SAMOTHRAKI

Samothraki, in the far northeast Aegean, is a small island with a mythical past. The Greek sea god Poseidon is said to have sat on Mount Fengari here — at 1,664m, the second highest in the Aegean — to watch the Trojan War, while in ancient times, numerous pilgrims would make the difficult voyage here to worship at the Sanctuary of the Cabeiri, or Great Gods. Now in ruins, this temple complex was home to a mystery religion, and very little is known about its secret rites. Anyone, from kings to slaves, could be initiated, and historical figures are thought to have been members — among them Philip II of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. After, head to the village of Therma, a 10-minute drive along the coast to the east, for its hot springs and nearby waterfalls so bucolic, you'd almost expect to come across a nymph.





EXPLORE A SANDY DESERT

## LEMNOS

It can be difficult to believe that, in among the pretty harbour towns, the Greek islands are also home to one of Europe's only deserts. Pachies Ammoudies, on Lemnos, one of the largest islands, resembles the Sahara on a smaller scale, its soft dunes constantly shifting with the wind. The best way to explore it is by hiring a 4WD in the capital, Myrina, and heading out at dawn or dusk, when the sand takes on an orange glow. Myrina itself was named after the Queen of the Amazons — the island is believed to have once been the home of the warrior women visited by the Argonauts — and you can spend hours exploring its traditional coffeeshops and colourful harbour. Also don't miss the ruins of Poliochni, a settlement thought to be older than nearby Troy on the Turkish mainland.

IMAGES: DISCOVERGREECE/GETTY

DANCE UNTIL DAWN

## IKARIA

Ikaria, in the far east of the Aegean, is closer to Izmir in Turkey than Athens. It is known for lying in a Blue Zone — an area where people have a longer, healthier life expectancy — with about one in three living into their 90s. The list of potential reasons is long, ranging from the healthy local diet to the lack of stress, but visit this island between May and September, and it's likely you'll discover one more — nobody wants to miss the next *paniyiri*. The island's saint's day festivals happen almost daily in different villages. Fuelled by the island's heady natural wine, they involve all ages dancing in unison together — placing their hands on each other's shoulders and spiralling in time to traditional violins. When you're partying until dawn, it can be easy to lose all track of time.

WACHSER THE OUZO EFFECT

## LESBOS

Ouzo, Greece's favourite anise-flavoured spirit, is largely produced on Lesbos, with its traditional villages and gnarled olive groves, where 16 dedicated distilleries work to make over half of the national supply. And for fans of the spirit, Plomari, on the south coast, shines like the North Star — it's here that travellers can find the Ouzo Museum, and learn about the drink's history and the variety of Greek herbs that go into making it, alongside tours of the copper stills. Each brand is different, and some are difficult to find beyond the island, so it's also where you'll find the best opportunities for tastings. Order with water on the side to observe the famous 'ouzo effect' — despite both liquids being clear, when combined the result turns milky-white. [theworldofouzo.gr](http://theworldofouzo.gr) **DF**



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WHERE TO GO WHEN

# KEY FESTIVALS IN THE GREEK ISLANDS

February

In February, the **Skyros Carnival** arrives for a vigorous celebration of the coming of Lent and the end of winter, the highlights of which include music in the streets and a parade of locals dressed in goatskins and bells, or as Skyrian brides.

March/April

In Greece, **Easter** is celebrated particularly fervently, with fireworks taking a starring role; Kalymnos, where even dynamite is not unheard of, has the most ear-splitting parties, while in Corfu Town householders hurl jugs of water off their balconies to dispel evil and welcome the birth of spring.

June

Hydra celebrates native son Miaoulis, the hero of the Greek War of Independence, with the **Miaoulia Festival**, which has concerts, art exhibits and talks. It culminates in a dramatic re-enactment of the sinking of an Ottoman ship on 24 June in the harbour with an enormous firework display.

July

Celebrating music and the arts, the **International Festival of the Aegean** returns in early July in the neo-classical opera house in Syros, featuring chamber music and opera performances. Meanwhile, in the Cyclades, Amorgos holds the **Psimeni Raki Festival** towards the end of the

month in Katapola, celebrating the sweet alcoholic drink with dancers in traditional costumes, fireworks and live music.

August

The **Assumption of the Virgin**, on 15 August, is the climax of the Greek summer. There are *paniyiri* saint's day festivals on most islands; Ikaria does them best. On the third weekend, Kefalonia's **Robola Wine Festival** in Fragata and Valsamata has food, wine and dancing until late.

September

On the second weekend of September, Spetses hosts the **Armata**, with traditional sailing ships and fireworks celebrating

the island's naval victory over the Ottomans in 1822. By mid-September, Aegina's **Pistachio Fair** has chefs, folk dancing and food stands dedicated to the nut. And on Santorini, there are re-enactments of the volcanic explosion that shaped the island during the **Ifaisteia Volcano Festival**, with a firework display.

October

Rhodes hosts the **Medieval Rose Festival** in autumn, usually in October, in honour of its name in Greek (Rhodos means 'rose') and its decades ruled by the Knights of St John. There's jousting, medieval-inspired music, and historical re-enactments of the Siege of Rhodes in 1522. **DF**

Easter is a riotous affair on Corfu, where musicians play in the streets and householders hurl water from balconies to welcome spring



IMAGE: ALAMY



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# CYCLADES



Learn Greek cooking at Narlis Farm  
Left: The farm, on Sifnos, has grown organic produce for generations

The Cyclades, in the southern Aegean north of Crete, are the archetypical Greek islands and the most popular among travellers, with their characteristic blue-domed churches and whitewashed villages arranged like scattered sugar cubes on hillsides. You'll also find many of Greece's finest beaches here, which are kept naturally air conditioned by the breeze that blows in from the sea

## SIP VOLCANIC WINES

### SANTORINI

This island may be best known for its vertiginous villages on the edge of the caldera, but it's also one of Greece's top wine producers. Because of its volcanic soil, Santorini was spared from the lice epidemic that decimated Europe's vineyards in the 19th century, and its indigenous white grapes, Assyrtiko, Athiri and Aidani, flourish, their vines pruned to resemble baskets to protect them from the wind. The resulting wine is bone dry and mineral rich — but you can also find the naturally sweet Vinsanto here, made from sun-dried grapes to produce a tippie that was popular in the Middle Ages. Try both kinds at the Santo, the island's largest cooperative in Pyrgos. Or visit the organic Hatzidakis estate, located inside a cave. [santowines.gr](http://santowines.gr) [hatzidakiswines.gr](http://hatzidakiswines.gr)

## LISTEN TO GREEK BLUES

### SYROS

Rebetiko, known as the Greek blues and often featuring soulful lyrics on migration, poverty, misfortune and unrequited love, has roots in the years of mass unemployment following the Greece-Turkey Population Exchange in 1923. One of the genre's greatest composers, Markos Vamvakaris, came from Ermoupoli on Syros, and live performances still ring out from bars on balmy nights here, especially during the summer Rebetiko Festival. Visit Ermoupoli itself, the neo-classical capital of the Cyclades, with its Catholic and Orthodox hilltop neighbourhoods, marble-paved Miaoulis Square and opera house. Don't miss its speciality *loukoumia* (Turkish delight), introduced to the island by refugees from the then-Ottoman ruled islands of Chios and Psara.

## COOK LIKE A GREEK

### SIFNOS

Sifnos is where the father of modern Greek cuisine, Nikolaos Tselementes, was born in 1878. The island's specialities are worth looking out for, with chickpea stews and braised lamb *mastelo* still slow cooked in the traditional way in stoneware pots. Learn some of the island's recipes by helping to prepare a typical meal at Narlis Farm, just outside Apollonia, where farmers have produced organic fruit and vegetables for generations according to traditional Cycladic methods, using very little water. Sifnos is exceptionally pretty, with the whitewashed villages Apollonia, Artemonas and Kastro, sandy beaches with seaside churches, and landscapes dotted with chapels, crisscrossed by miles of trails. [sifnos-farm-narlis.com](http://sifnos-farm-narlis.com)



## GREEK ISLANDS

Clockwise from below: The Temple of Apollo on Naxos; blooming bougainvillea in Pyrgos, Santorini; *fourtalía*, a style of omelette popular in Tinos; the T-Oinos vineyard on Tinos, one of the island's most beautiful

### STAY IN A SYRMATA

## MILOS

Volcanic Milos is an island of colour, with rock formations in shades of red, yellow and blinding white. Similarly bright doors and windows adorn its traditional *syrmata* — the huts found only around Milos and neighbouring Kimolos, carved into the soft volcanic cliffs by fishermen sheltering their boats for the winter. Some have been converted into quirky places to stay — a bit cramped, with just a bed and bathroom, but right on the water's edge. On land, seek out the catacombs (the only ones on a Greek island), the ancient theatre and the replica of the Venus de Milo, marking the spot where the original was found. [catacombs.gr](http://catacombs.gr)

### FIND THE MARBLES

## NAXOS

Fine, white marble has been quarried and sculpted on Naxos since prehistoric times; the archaeology museum, in the Venetian castle on top of Naxos Town, is packed with remarkably well-preserved marble Cycladic idols from 3200-2300 BCE, smoothed with the island's native emery. Elsewhere on the island, giant kouros (naked male youth) statues, carved in the 6th century BCE, were abandoned when flaws in the marble were discovered: today, two lie near the quarries in Apollonas. Naxos has a relaxed and family-friendly vibe, with walking trails and swathes of sand south of Naxos Town. [archaeologicalmuseums.gr](http://archaeologicalmuseums.gr) **DF**



### CYCLADES

# 48 HOURS ON TINOS

**This little outpost in the Aegean has become famous among Greeks as an island of gastronomy in recent years, and it's close enough to Athens to add on to a trip to the capital. Words: Anastasia Miari**

The Cycladic island of Tinos, southeast across the Aegean Sea from Athens, is said to owe its rock-strewn landscape to a mighty clash of the Titans. In Ancient Greek mythology, the Titans slung colossal granite boulders at each other during a brawl, and these now dot the island's wildflower meadows, marble quarries and sprawling vineyards. But this breezy little island isn't just famous for its scenery. Blessed with fertile land and a resulting bounty of locally grown produce, Tinos has become known as an island of good food among Greeks in recent years, and Athenian chefs will often leave their city restaurants in the warmer months to head here for a feast of a summer. Tinos Food Paths, a festival of gastronomy, celebrated in the second week of May each year, marks the beginning of the season of indulgence. Here's how you can enjoy your own gastronomic journey around Tinos.

#### HOW TO DO IT:

Fly to Athens or Mykonos and then catch one of the regular ferries to Tinos with Seajets or Golden Star ferries. The journey from Mykonos to Tinos is 20 minutes, while the ferry from Athens takes two hours.

[seajets.com](http://seajets.com)

[goldenstarferries.gr](http://goldenstarferries.gr)

Doubles at the Crossroads Inn from €170 (£145), room only. [crossroadsinn.gr](http://crossroadsinn.gr)





## DAY ONE

### Morning

Start the day with breakfast at one of the oldest cafes on the island. O Megalos Kafenes is a traditional Greek cafe in Pyrgos, one of the most beautiful villages in Tinos, which sits amid quarries of the rich, white marble that's found in abundance here. Pull up a pew at a marble table in the dappled shade of an enormous plane tree, and sip on a silty Greek coffee with a *galaktoboureko* pastry on the side — layers of crispy filo filled with creamy custard.

### Midday

Kolimvithra beach, on the north coast of the island, is one to head to for a relaxed, bohemian atmosphere and a great surf scene. Thanks to the strong winds of the Aegean, this stretch of sand gets good surf and is the best spot on Tinos to learn to ride the waves. A pop-up beach bar in a converted VW van adds to the hippy feel. Choose from a selection of fresh village salads and acai bowls made with local produce such as wild strawberries.

### Evening

Don't turn up to this one without a booking; To Thalassaki has become so popular that the yachting crowd regularly sail over from nearby Mykonos. Specialising in Tinian seafood with a refined twist, it's so close to the sea's edge that your flip-flops could be in danger of being washed away by the waves. The mussel, shrimp and calamari pasta dishes are famous here, as are the ouzo-steamed mussels. Just above To Thalassaki sits Exo Meria, a lofty bar overlooking the inky-blue Aegean with one of the best sunset views on the island.

## DAY TWO

### Morning

Hidden from the view of marauding pirates, Tripotamos village in the south was cleverly built as a maze-like settlement, which only reveals itself once you step inside its narrow alleyways. The Crossroads Inn here offers one of the best breakfasts, with a focus on Tinian produce. Start the day with organic eggs, vine-ripened tomatoes and sourdough bread, followed by traditional spanakopita pies, Greek yoghurt, honey and a selection of home-made jams, marmalades and cheeses.

### Midday

Tinos is giving Santorini a run for its money where wine is concerned. Thanks to its rich, volcanic soil, the island has become a hotspot for oenophiles, and it now has around 10 producers working on their family vineyards. Varieties range from a fresh Assyrtiko, a refreshing, dry white, to the dark and spicy Mavrotragano. The most beautiful vineyards on the island are Volacus and T-Oinos, where you can sip a chilled glass in the afternoon sun.

### Evening

Tinos's traditional dishes are what lure Greeks from the mainland. The local must-tries include *fourtalia* — a fluffy omelette made with potatoes — and *louza*, the island's spice-cured pork, which was introduced to Tinos by the conquering Venetians around 800 years ago. You can find it at family-run Teréza's in Mirsini village towards the south of the island. It's a tiny spot that also doubles as a convenience store, with pretty potted geraniums dotted around the yard.





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TOP 5

## BEACHES IN THE GREEK ISLANDS

### Pori, Koufonisia, Cyclades

The beaches on Koufonisia, southeast of Naxos, are all outstanding, but Pori is the crème de la crème: a sheltered half-moon of soft sand and shallow water, in varying shades of powder blue, warmed by the sun. There's a taverna here, but nothing else.

### East and West, Paxos, Ionian

It's worth spending a full day visiting this white, almost Caribbean-like beauty immersed in greenery, with silky sand and calm, turquoise waters. The pair of tavernas here are ideal for drinks and leisurely lunches of grilled sardines. Get there by excursion boat or sea taxi from Paxos.

### Simos, Peloponnese

Hourglass-shaped Simos, with its rose-tinted dunes, sand lilies and lifeguard-patrolled shallows, is perfect for families. There are tavernas for lazy lunches, and even a campsite for those who can't tear themselves away. Stay overnight for moonlit swims just south of the Peloponnese.

### Sarakinika, Milos, Cyclades

If Salvador Dalí designed a beach, it would look like this — a strip of sand surrounded by a moonscape of white volcanic rock spilling into an indigo sea. Spread your towel here for an unforgettable day out.

### Agios Nikolaos, Dodecanese

Perfect for channelling your inner Robinson Crusoe, this beach is on its own desert island. Excursion boats from Kassos, northeast of Crete, make the 25-minute trip — but, in full castaway style, you'll be expected to swim to shore. **DF**







The closest Greek islands to Athens, to the northeast, the Saronics are relatively little-known to travellers but ideal for those wanting to combine island-hopping with a stay in the capital, or an exploration of the nearby Peloponnese's highlights. Each has played a starring role in Greek history, so there are archaeological sites to be found here in abundance

#### SNORKEL IN CLEAR COVES

### AGISTRI

Less than an hour from Athens' port city of Piraeus, Agistri is the smallest of the inhabited Saronics. Surrounded by twinkling waters, its pine trees cling to the cliffs that curl around its mainly pebbly beaches. Aim for the little peninsula of Aponisos, with its turquoise coves perfect for snorkelling, just a short bus ride from Skala and Megalochori, Agistri's main towns. Or head out with Interdive and sail in its traditional wooden ship to the uninhabited islet of Dorousa, whose fish-rich waters and shipwrecks are exciting terrain for experienced divers. [interdive.gr](http://interdive.gr)

#### WANDER IN A LEMON FOREST

### POROS

Poros is so close to the Peloponnese that the 400-metre-wide channel separating the two is nicknamed Greece's Grand Canal. A favourite past time in pretty Poros Town is lingering in a waterfront taverna and watching all the ships pass by, including ferries zipping across to Galatas, a port town on the mainland. Near there is a lemon forest that becomes intoxicating in May, when the trees are in bloom and the citrusy scent drifts across the channel on the breeze. For a perfect day out, hike up to the pretty blue-and-white clocktower in Poros Town for views over the lemon forests.

Above from left: The Temple of Aphaia, on Aegina; pretty Spetses was once a retreat for wealthy Athenians



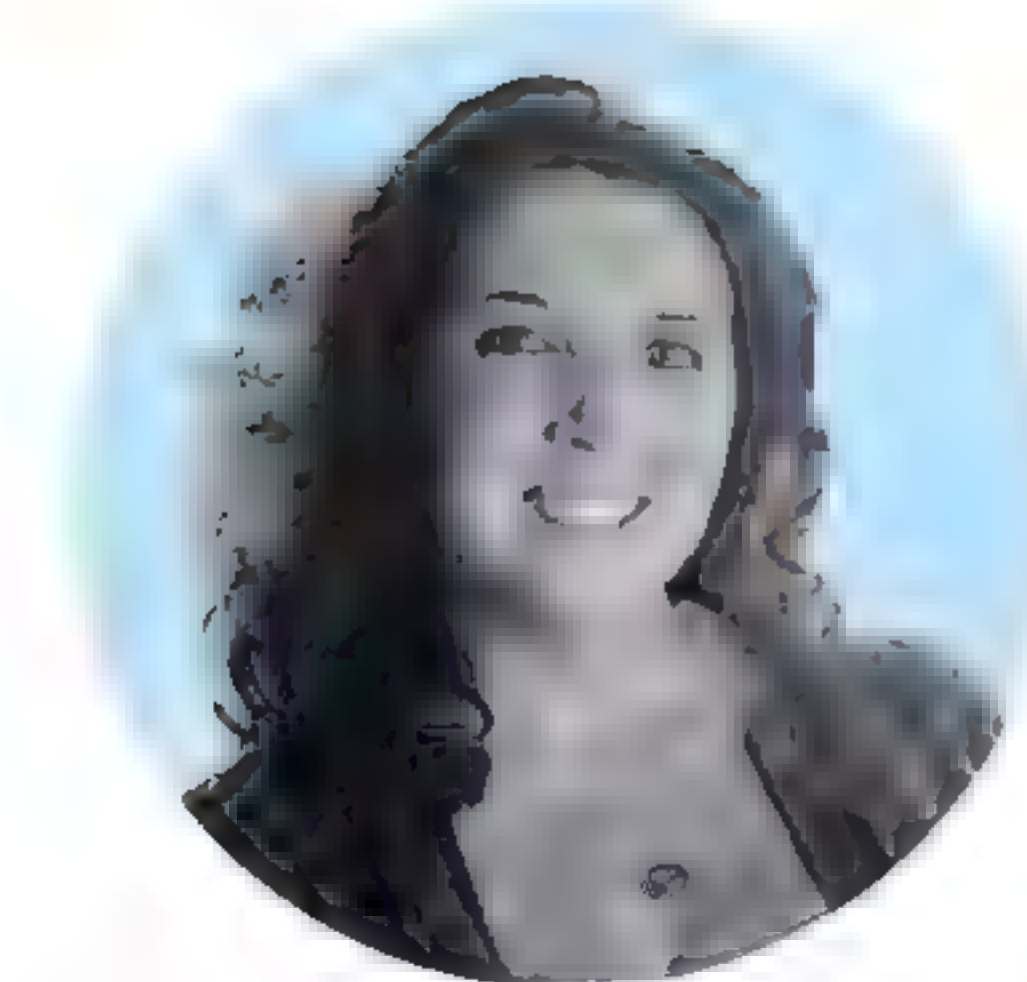


## GET TO KNOW BOUBOULINA SPETSES

Thought to be the world's first female admiral, Laskarina Bouboulina, who grew up in Spetses, raised a small fleet during the Greek War of Independence in the 1820s and won Greece's first naval battle aboard her flagship, *Agamemnon*. Her bronze statue stands near the harbour, and now her descendants run the charming Bouboulina Museum in her former mansion — where she was assassinated in a family dispute. Pine-clad Spetses later became the summer retreat of wealthy Athenians and, in 1914, was the first Greek island to get a hotel, the luxurious Poseidonion Grand Hotel, which still dominates the harbour today. The rest of the waterfront, still bristling with cannons, is filled with neoclassical former captains' mansions, villas, black-and-white pebble mosaics and horse-drawn carriages. Visitors can cycle to the beaches — many sandy — and later dine in the bars and restaurants in the Old Harbour. [bouboulinamuseum.com](http://bouboulinamuseum.com) [poseidonion.com](http://poseidonion.com)

## TRACE ANCIENT GREECE AEGINA

Outside of Athens, surviving ancient peristyle temples are rare in Greece, but you can find a beautiful one just an hour from Piraeus by ferry — the Temple of Aphaia, on Aegina. Isolated on a pine-covered hill overlooking the island's biggest beach resort, Agia Marina, the temple was built around 500 BCE — decades before the Parthenon. Sadly, like the Parthenon, it was stripped of its marble friezes by antiquarians, inspired by Elgin, who shipped them to Munich. Aegina has many other feathers in its cap: pretty Aegina Town, the first capital of Greece, where the scent of roasting pistachios fills the air. A remnant of this can be explored at the Archaeological Site of Kolona nearby, which contains the ruins of the Temple of Apollo, and a neighbouring archaeology museum. The ruins of another former capital, Byzantine Paleochora, can be found to the east above Agios Nektarios, one of the biggest churches in Greece, built for the most recent Greek Orthodox saint, who died in 1920. **DF**



Q &amp; A

## BETTANY HUGHES

Author, historian and broadcaster

### WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE GREEK ISLANDS?

There's a depth of history on the islands that you don't find elsewhere. Because they're so isolated, they're home to incredible historical sights that just wouldn't have survived on the mainland.

### WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE ON THE GREEK ISLANDS?

On the island of Naxos, there's this marble cliff into which a giant statue of one of the gods — probably Dionysus — has been carved. It would've been a colossal statue had it been finished, but the fact that you're seeing a moment interrupted makes it somehow more magical.

### CAN YOU RECOMMEND A LESSER-KNOWN SITE IN THE SARONICS WORTH VISITING?

In northeastern Poros, there's a bronze age settlement called Kavos Vasili. Last inhabited around 3,500 years ago, it really gives a sense of how early civilisation started on the Greek islands.

### WHICH ISLAND WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR LOVERS OF GREEK MYTH?

The island of Ikaria is believed to be where the mythical character Icarus fell to earth after flying too close to the sun. It's also thought to be where Odysseus, on his way home to Ithaca, was lured in by the enchantress Circe. Interestingly, the island is home to a plethora of plants and herbs, which locals still use to concoct natural remedies.

*Bettany's latest book, **The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World**, published by W&N, is out now. £29.99. INTERVIEW: SAM KEMP*



EYEWITNESS

## FREE ROAM

**The mountainous island of Hydra, off the east coast of the Peloponnese, is a car-free zone where travellers explore on foot, by boat or from the saddle, taking life at a slow pace. Words: Julia Buckley**

Looming into view, as the ferry from Athens approaches its harbour, Hydra seems like any other island at first. Fluttering Greek flags wave me into port, white houses gleam in the sunshine, all of them spilling down the hillside towards the calm sea. I can hear glasses clinking in harbour bars and see B&Bs owners beside the dock waiting to whisk visitors back to their premises.

Except these locals aren't waiting, as they normally do in the Greek islands, in their cars. Hydra — off the east coast of the Peloponnese, 90 minutes by boat from Piraeus — is car-free. Even bicycles are banned, thanks to a 1950s law that sought to keep it as it's always been — a labyrinth of alleys to be explored on foot, or aided by the island's mules.

Flashing me a grin, Petros Feimi, the porter sent by the Orloff Hotel, my accommodation in the town of Hydra, tips my suitcase into his cart and trundles off with it along the cobbles, weaving around sandal-clad tourists, mules shifting idly from hoof to hoof and cats snoozing in the sun. He leads me uphill, like a pied piper, fielding *'kalimera's* ('good day's) as he goes. Petros is strong — not even running my luggage up 30-odd steps can make him break a sweat.

"You get used to it," says Harriet Jarman when I meet her the next morning, after walking through town to her stables, Harriet's Hydra Horses. Her eight steeds are busy chewing noisily on fresh hay. "You see elderly women carrying three bags of shopping," she says. "My son had to learn to walk at 18 months because I couldn't carry him."

Harriet was 10 when she and her mum moved from Buckinghamshire to Hydra. "We came on holiday and loved it, so we stayed," she says simply, grooming Melina — a dappled grey rescue from the Peloponnese — under a gum tree. A life-long rider, Harriet was the first on this island of equines — there are over 1,000 of them here, all working animals — to offer horse-riding to visitors, in 2014.

"It's a lot easier to see the island from the saddle," she says. "There are lots of stairs and ups and downs here. On a horse, you can sit back and enjoy the view." Harriet takes visitors along cliff-side mule tracks and up to monasteries in the mountains. "It's 50-50 whether they let us in now. Before the pandemic, they'd invite us in for coffee."

The next day, I catch sight of Harriet as I'm walking back from a beach swim, leading her group of horses along Hydra's sole cliff path, which unfurls either side of town along a five-mile stretch of the north coast. Hydra is fairly barren with few roads; your only options to reach some of the coves is to sail or walk.

Boats are best for the furthest beaches, beyond the path: Bisti, a tiny cove backed by a rare grove of trees towards Hydra's western tip; and Agios Nikolaos, a calm, gulf-like indent on the southwest coast set between mountains. But closer to town, walking becomes part of the experience.

This morning, I'd started out with a boat ride to Plakes beach, around two miles west of town, for my early dip. Now, I'm strolling along a ruddy dirt path that runs east back to town. It leads behind cottages and grand painted mansions built by wealthy shipowners in Hydra's heyday in the 18th and 19th centuries — the Orloff Hotel is one such building, dating from 1798. Taxi boats skim across the water, the thumb of the Peloponnese hovering in the distance out to sea.

I pass a blue-domed church, then a cliffside amphitheatre — boho Hydra's cultural scene peaked in the 1960s, when the likes of Leonard Cohen lived here — before dipping down to Vlychos beach. My efforts are rewarded with a feast of garlic-marinated anchovies and watermelon and feta salad at Enalion, a beachside restaurant set between acacia trees. Without cars, it's so quiet I swear I hear the butterfly that lands on my table as I finish my goblet of Peloponnese red.

Following an afternoon on Vlychos beach, snoozing in the sun like one of those Hydriot cats, I head back to town, across a humped bridge and up the cliffside, watching the Peloponnese coastline unfurl across the water. The path lifts as gently as a Leonard Cohen song, past the tiny harbour of Kamini, where fishing boats bob; up again to a bench dedicated to Cohen; and past the cliffside restaurants marking the entrance to Hydra town. The sun is setting, the sea is flushing pink and alleyways of whitewashed houses spiral invitingly off from the waterfront. I'd worried that a car-free island might turn a break into a chore, but on Hydra, the journey really does make the experience.

Clockwise from top left: Vlychos beach; Hydra Town's waterfront is lined with tavernas; the town is a labyrinth of narrow pathways; horses, mules and donkeys are used for transport

**HOW TO DO IT:** There's no airport in Hydra, but there are flights from various UK airports to Athens with Aegean Airlines, British Airways, EasyJet, Ryanair and Jet2. From Athens, there's a 90-minute hydrofoil from Piraeus. On Hydra, there are regular boats to beaches such as Plakes and Vlychos, as well as those further afield such as Agios Nikolaos and Bisti. [aegeanair.com](http://aegeanair.com) [ba.com](http://ba.com) [easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com) [ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com) [jet2.com](http://jet2.com) [bluestarferries.com](http://bluestarferries.com). Doubles at Hotel Orloff from £150, B&B. [orloff.gr](http://orloff.gr)

**MORE INFO:** [hydradirect.com](http://hydradirect.com) [harrietshydrahorses.com](http://harrietshydrahorses.com) [enalion-hydra.gr](http://enalion-hydra.gr)









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# SPORADES



Bourtzi Hotel, Skiathos

Scattered across the Aegean off the east coast of central Greece, the Sporades islands managed to avoid the history books for the most part. For that reason archaeological sites and monuments are rare; instead, they offer rugged scenery, pine-backed beaches and traditional towns that are perfect for pottering beside the sea

HIKE WILDFLOWER TRAILS

## SKOPELOS

The emerald sea reflects the pine trees covering Skopelos, a serene island of pebble-strewn coves that's great for walks and views. Near the town of Skopelos, piled high in the shadow of a Venetian castle, wildflower-dotted trails lead to six Byzantine monasteries on Mount Palouki. You can also hike to the Sedoukia, a collection of Neolithic tombs, or to the wedding chapel of Agios Ioannis — of *Mamma Mia!* film fame — perched high on a rock overlooking the sea near the island's second town, Glossa.

MEET SKYRIAN HORSES

## SKYROS

Isolated from its sisters, Skyros has a whitewashed capital, Chora, that curls around a castle-crowned crag overlooking a vast beach. The northern half of the island is wooded, while the wild, rocky south is where a few of the last little Skyrian horses roam. Introduced in the fifth century BCE by Athenian colonists and isolated ever since, they're the descendants of the horses depicted in the Parthenon Marbles. With only around 200 left, they're one of the rarest breeds in the world.

HIT THE BEACH

## SKIATHOS

Cosmopolitan Skiathos, beside Skopelos, owes its popularity to its 62 beaches, which offer a stretch of sand for every taste. Koukounaries and Vromolimnos are best for watersports, while Aselinos is ideal for those after a quieter time, with just a few places to eat. Lalaria, meanwhile, is spectacular and silvery, and Kechria, with its sunbeds amid the olive trees, is perfect for a lazy afternoon punctuated by lunch in the taverna. As the sun sets, pretty, fun-loving Skiathos Town buzzes into life.

ENJOY A SHIPWRECK ADVENTURE

## ALONNISOS

From May to October, boats head out on day trips to explore the waters off Alonnisos, which is part of Europe's largest marine park. Here, endangered monk seals are protected along with dolphins and over 80 species of bird. Experienced divers can tour the 'Parthenon of shipwrecks', a fifth-century BCE vessel laden with amphoras that sunk off the coast of nearby islet Peristera and now forms the core of Greece's first underwater museum. [museum.alonissos.gov.gr](http://museum.alonissos.gov.gr) **DF**



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ON LOCATION

# GREEK ISLAND FILM LOCATIONS

## Little Spetses

Little Spetses, two hours from Athens by sea, is a place where the scents of jasmine and pine mingle in the air and waft down over the terracotta roofs of the *kapetanospita* (captains' houses) in the historic centre. Its picture-book charms have drawn the eyes of Hollywood multiple times, most recently in *The Lost Daughter*, starring Olivia Colman and Dakota Johnson, and *Glass Onion*, featuring Daniel Craig and Kate Hudson.

## Skopelos, Greece

The emerald isle of Skopelos was ushered into the spotlight in 2008 with the release of the hit musical film *Mamma Mia!*, featuring songs from the pop group ABBA and starring Meryl Streep and Amanda Seyfried. The wedding scene, with its pretty, white chapel perched precariously between trees atop a rocky, sea-washed pinnacle, was filmed at the church of Agios Ioannis on the northeast coast.

## Corfu, Greece

Parts of the 1981 James Bond instalment *For Your Eyes Only* were filmed on the Ionian island of Corfu, in among the olive and cypress trees. The Achilleion palace, in Gastouri, was used for the casino scene. More recently, Benitses, the pretty harbour village south of Corfu Town and north of Messonghi, was used for the waterfront scenes in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding 3*.

## Island of Santorini

On the northern tip of Santorini, the charming town of Oia — famed for its jumble of traditional white houses clinging to a steep slope of a caldera — offers such a dramatic natural setting that it feels almost tailor-made for the silver screen. In the 2003 film *Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life*, Angelina Jolie can be seen taking part in a jet ski chase in the waters overlooked by the town's vertiginous cliffs. **DF**



The church of Agios Ioannis, on Skopelos, which was featured in the film *Mamma Mia!* Below: The church of Agios Ioannis was used for the film's wedding scene; Oia, on Santorini, had a starring role in a *Tomb Raider* film







### GETTING THERE & AROUND

Corfu, Kos, Kefalonia, Lefkada, Lemnos and Lesbos, Mykonos, Rhodes, Santorini, Skiathos and Zakynthos have direct seasonal flights from the UK with British Airways, Ryanair, EasyJet, Tui and Jet2. [ba.com](http://ba.com) [ryanair.com](http://ryanair.com) [easyjet.com](http://easyjet.com) [tui.co.uk](http://tui.co.uk) [jet2.com](http://jet2.com) Flight times from London range from three hours, for Corfu, to just over four hours for Rhodes. Karpachos, Kalymnos, Ikaria, Skyros, Milos, Naxos and Syros have domestic airports served by Aegean Air, Olympic Air and Sky Express. [aegean.com](http://aegean.com) [olympicair.com](http://olympicair.com) [skyexpress.gr](http://skyexpress.gr)

Ferries and hydrofoils also serve the Saronics (including Hydra) and Sifnos from Athens' port city, Piraeus; for Tinos, take the bus from Athens airport to the port of Rafina; for Paxos, sail from Corfu; for Skopelos and Alonnisos, sail from Skiathos or Volos. For Nisyros, Symi and Tilos, sail from Rhodes or Kos; Alexandroupolis in northeastern Greece is the port for Samothraki. Book connections with Direct Ferries. [directferries.com](http://directferries.com) Bus services on the larger islands, such as Corfu and Rhodes, may be adequate, but to explore the Greek islands properly you almost always

need to hire a car, motorbike or bicycle; e-bikes are increasingly popular. Alternatively, it's possible to explore many of the islands by boat.

### WHEN TO GO

July and August are the most expensive and busiest months in which to visit, as well as the hottest, when temperatures can hit 40C in the afternoon. April, May, June, September and October are milder (average temperatures range from 18C to 27C) and less crowded but they can also be wet. It's generally warm enough to swim in the sea from May to October;

if you can choose, May, June and September are the best months to go.

### MORE INFO

[visitgreece.gr](http://visitgreece.gr)

### HOW TO DO IT

Greek island specialists include Sunvil and Olympic Holidays, while Jet2 and Tui also offer packages and Much Better Adventures has active itineraries. Responsible Travel has a number of sailing trips. [sunvil.co.uk](http://sunvil.co.uk) [olympicholidays.com](http://olympicholidays.com) [jet2holidays.com](http://jet2holidays.com) [tui.co.uk](http://tui.co.uk) [muchbetteradventures.com](http://muchbetteradventures.com) [responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com)



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IMAGES: TIME + TIDE





# WALK OF LIFE

SOUTH LUANGWA NATIONAL PARK IN ZAMBIA IS THE ORIGINAL HOME OF THE WALKING SAFARI, WITH CAMPING SLEEP-OUTS AND LEOPARD ENCOUNTERS ALL PART OF AN EXPERIENCE PIONEERED IN THE 1950S. NOW, A NEW GENERATION OF LOCALS IS BUILDING ON THAT LEGACY

WORDS: AMANDA CANNING



CHARLES SAKALA IS MILDLY OBSESSED WITH ANIMAL POOP. WE HAVE BEEN WALKING FOR ONLY HALF AN HOUR AND HAVE STOPPED SEVERAL TIMES TO STARE AT ASSORTED LUMPS OF WASTE ON THE GROUND.

"See here," he says, poking a stick at a low mound of shiny brown pellets. "Impala dung. Leopards roll in it to disguise their smell when they are hunting." A few paces on, he stops to prod another specimen, this one a scattering of neat balls so white and bright they look artificial. "Hyena," he says solemnly. "You can see from the colour that they eat a lot of bones."

We are in South Luangwa National Park, a protected swathe of land covering 3,490 square miles of eastern Zambia. The region was established as a game reserve in 1938, with the twisting tangle of the Luangwa River and the mountainous bulk of the Muchinga Escarpment acting as its natural borders. In the 1950s, the park pioneered the concept of the walking safari — an approach to game-viewing that allows visitors to experience the land as its resident wildlife does, on foot.

It's late May and the park is entering dry season, its vegetation thinning and the greens of the bush slowly edging into beiges and browns. Charles, in a khaki shirt and sand-coloured cargo trousers, perfectly matches the changing of the seasons. He is also the perfect guide, with 13 years' experience under his belt and a knack for mixing a giddy, wonder-filled awe at the landscapes around him with an encyclopaedic knowledge of every creature great and small within it.

We meet at Time + Tide Mchenja, a tented camp in a grove of ebony trees on the banks of the Luangwa River. The camp, dismantled

each year before the rains of the wet season cause the Luangwa to break its banks, and rebuilt again when it recedes, has only just reopened. A thigh-high mark on an albida tree at the entrance to the site reveals how far the waters rose in the past year. With a troop of yellow baboons squabbling in the shade of the trees and warthogs snuffling for roots in the already desiccated earth, it's hard to imagine that the land has ever been submerged, let alone so recently.

Our aim for the day is to walk through the park to Kakuli, another Time + Tide camp five miles south. Having lain awake for much of the night, listening to a hippo pulling up grass in uncomfortably close proximity to my reed-walled lodge, I had been relieved when the haunting shrieks of a flock of hadeda ibis announced the arrival of dawn. We set off shortly after, with armed rangers up front and bringing up the rear. "Walking is about the small things you miss in a Jeep," whispers Charles as we pad quietly through the bush. "The sights, the smells, the sounds. It is very special because we touch the earth."

Our trail leads through thickets of thorny acacia, over open grassland and along paths created by generations of hippos trundling up and down the same route between the river and favoured grazing spot. We edge around deep craters left by the ponderous feet of elephants and wonder if, perhaps, a leopard lurks in the undergrowth watching our clumsy progress through its territory.



Clockwise from top: Guide Charles Sakala; the Luangwa River; lodge at Time + Tide Kakuli; carmine bee-eaters migrate to the park in September; Previous pages: Walking safaris run from May to November; the endemic Thornicroft's giraffe











We pause each time Charles’s eyes alight with forensic precision on some tiny bit of evidence that an animal recently passed this way — from the small scrapings in the sand that mark the tracks of a white-tailed mongoose to a slender quill that was once attached to a porcupine. With the steady call of unseen ring-necked doves a constant refrain to our slow, focused amble, he points out the nests of weaver birds, a striped feather shed by an African goshawk and a tiny Mozambique nightjar camouflaged in the dirt. He explains the traditional uses of cassia tree pods (“good for stomach cramps”), wild mint (“people use it in a tea to help with Covid symptoms”) and the bark of a leadwood tree (“medicine for bilharzia disease”).

It is barely 9am and the heat is already bordering on oppressive when we come again to the Luangwa and spy the camp at Kakuli in the distance. For the final 30 minutes, we walk along the river bank, observed by pods of hippos which pop up in the water to inspect the trespassers, honk noisily then disappear in a ring of bubbles. At a final bend, a large monitor lizard falls out of a tree immediately in front of us and lands in the mud with a thump. It looks slightly surprised, then scrabbles away into the river. “When you go out, you don’t know what you will see,” says Charles, laughing. “Mother Nature might say, ‘oh, come around this corner and see what I have for you’. That is the beauty.”

After a few hours at ground level in the bush, I feel pretty relaxed about letting Mother Nature decide the script, and less driven by a need to see the conventional headline stars of safari. “When you love all of nature,” Charles tells me when we arrive at Kakuli, “you are happy to see everything. Safari is not just about seeing lions.”

**The valley of the leopard**

Zambia is credited as the birthplace of the walking safari thanks to the trailblazing British conservationist Norman Carr. At a time

when big-game-hunting was still very much in vogue among European and American travellers to Africa, he set about establishing national parks in the region, including South Luangwa, and encouraging visitors to shoot animals only with their cameras. Even more unusually, he placed the needs of the environment and local communities over the whims of rifle-wielding trophy-hunters.

Twenty-seven years after his death, his influence in the park remains strong. Time + Tide took over the safari company he set up and our second camp is a tribute to the nickname locals gave him — *kakuli* meaning ‘solitary buffalo’. Its open-fronted, thatched lodges look out over the Luangwa and it’d be easy to drift off here, enjoying the views of mud-caked crocodiles slumped on the shore and the pleasant breeze sweeping up from the river.

But there is too much happening in the park to allow for a post-walk doze. It may be best known for the quieter, more immersive pleasures of an on-foot safari, but South Luangwa does still have the headline stars that pull many visitors to southern Africa, and they are best seen from the back of a Land Rover. I have already heard some of them — the deep, guttural roar of lions having occasionally broken through the noise of the dining hippo the previous night at Mchenja.

It doesn’t require much patience to encounter large wildlife here. We bump along dirt tracks as the setting sun casts long



From left: There are thought to be around 12,000 elephants in South Luangwa, down from 100,000 in the 1980s; the park is one of the best places in Africa to see leopards







WHEN THE MOON SETS  
AT AROUND 2AM, THE  
WORLD FALLS SILENT.  
A UNIVERSE OF STARS IS  
REVEALED, THE STREAKED  
BAND OF THE MILKY  
WAY SHINING VIVID AND  
INTENSE AMONG THEM





shadows and turns the bush golden. Herds of impala, puku and zebra create natural roadblocks and watch entirely unmoved as we approach, before slowly plodding off, some of the more skittish antelope making improbably large and graceful leaps over the undergrowth to get away. We come across several of the park's endemic Thornicroft's giraffe, whose markings stop at the knees and give the impression that they're wearing long, brown socks. A baby elephant blocks our path and furiously waggles his ears and trunk in an attempt to appear threatening, before abruptly spinning around and fleeing into the bush with a strangled trumpet blast.

As stars start to speckle the darkening sky, we stop at a lake to watch an enormous hippo lumbering out of the water, a plump calf keeping close behind. The gentle chirruping of frogs is interrupted by a sudden commotion — a troop of baboons, in a frenzy of barking. "I'm sure there's a leopard nearby," says Charles, and we set off again, propelled by a rising sense of anticipation.

Before it gained fame as the birthplace of the walking safari, South Luangwa was known as 'the valley of the leopard'. There are no reliable statistics as to how many live in the park, but it's regarded as one of the best places in Africa to see them. "There are so many leopards because there is so much food," explains Charles, as we shine torches into the undergrowth. "There are millions of impala and millions of bushbucks. And they love this environment, with so many trees."

Rounding a corner, we come across our quarry lying in a clearing by the side of the track — two leopard cubs, less than two years old. "Their mother is probably hunting," whispers Charles. "But she has no chance now the baboons know she is here." The cubs show no interest in our presence, and eventually slink off into the bushes.

It's the first of several leopard sightings during our time in the reserve. For the final couple of days, we move further south to a

more forested area pockmarked with lagoons, their surfaces carpeted in bright green Nile cabbage. Here, we regularly come across the same female leopard — we see her by a waterhole in broad daylight, a tiny cub bounding behind her on unsteady legs; on the branch of a mopane tree at sunset, limbs dangling either side; and, in the dead of night, trailed by a hulking great hyena intent on poaching her kill.

### Under star-filled skies

Chinzombo, a lodge in that southern portion of the park, is even more closely connected to Norman Carr. Located near the site of one of his old camps, which disappeared when the river eroded its plot, it's accessed by a boat ride across a broad, brown sweep of the Luangwa. Black-and-white photos of Carr decorate the wooden shelves of the open-air lounge and dining area, alongside well-thumbed books on African insects, necklaces made from pumpkin seeds, and an old crocodile skull. The strangest of family portraits are the shots with Big Boy and Little Boy, two orphaned lions he rescued as cubs and released back into the wild as adults. There's Carr, pipe wedged into a corner of his mouth, a cub tucked neatly under each arm; in another, there he is nonchalantly shaving his face with a razor as two fully grown lions play not half a metre away; another shows his son strolling along with one of the 'boys' as casually as one might walk a dog.



Previous pages: Sleeping in the wild, on the dried-up bed of the Luwi River  
Clockwise from top: Nile crocodiles resting in the sun on the banks of the river; the dining area at Chinzombo lodge; a seed from a red mahogany tree; female hippos give birth to two to five calves over their lifetime





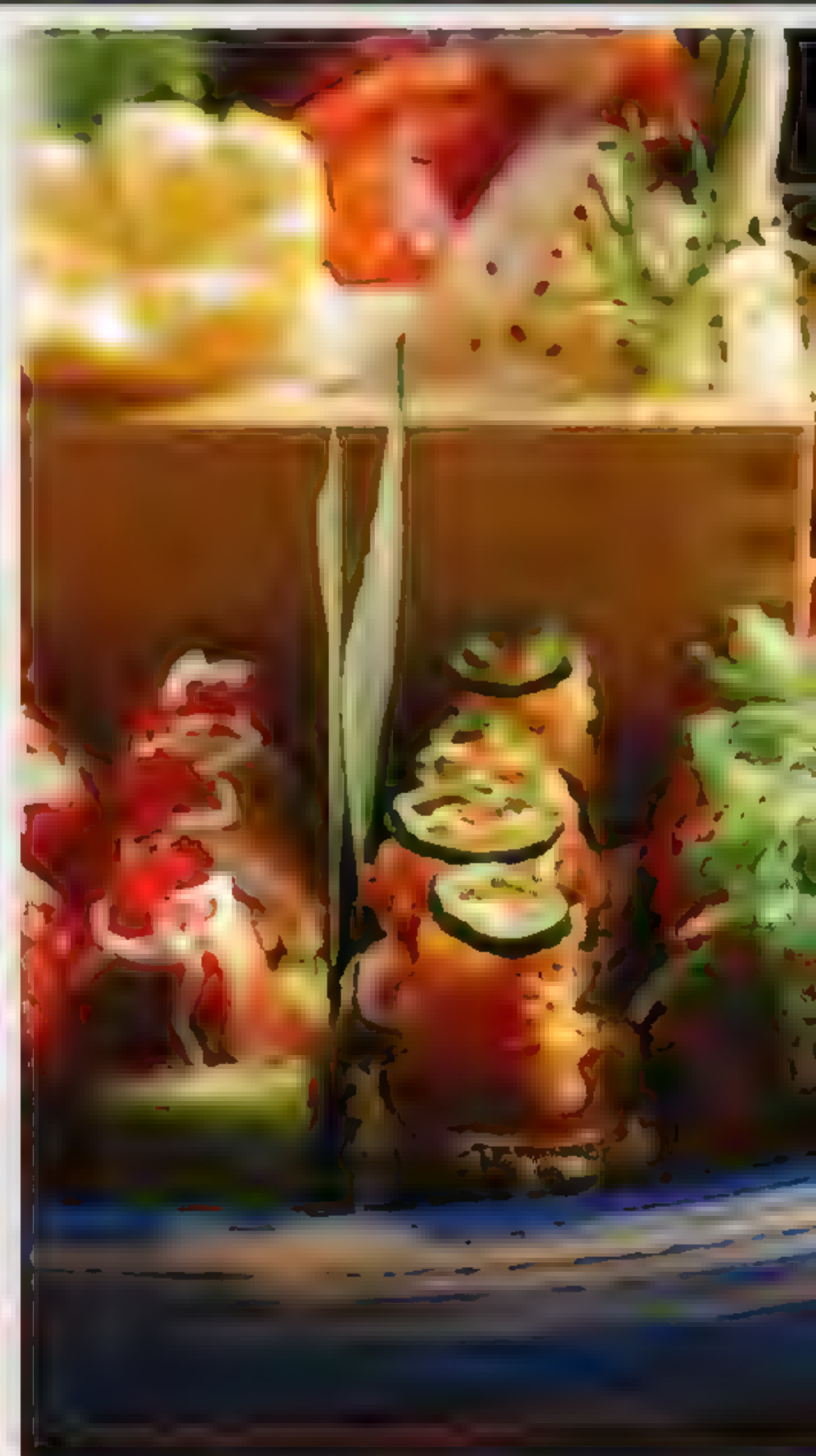




# LIFT

STEAKHOUSE & ROOFTOP BAR

Located at the one of the most iconic commercial buildings of the city of Tirana, Aba Business Center, LIFT is about representing a concept of a classic and sophisticated steakhouse combined with style and vibes of a nightlife experience.

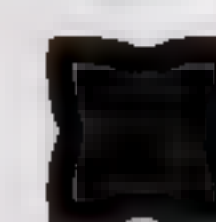


# SALT



SALT is a restaurant nicety perceived from the people behind the REVO group, which are deeply experienced in hospitality services, property management, marketing, events and more. Salt is about tasting the Mediterranean cuisine, seafood and sushi. It is a one-stop shop for food and beverage experiences,

providing something for everyone from daytime, dining, nightlife and events. Our mission is to stir up a revolutionary concept of the restaurant by exceeding the client's expectations in a dimension where time, food and drink will savour more.







A walk with a lion is obviously not an experience offered at the camp these days, but Chinzombo does give visitors the chance to get as close to the bush as Carr regularly did — by sleeping in it. After a bumpy drive along a track fringed by tall grass, Charles and I arrive at a dried-out stretch of the Luwi River just as the sun starts to dip below the horizon. Set up on the white sands are my sleeping quarters for the night: a roll-up mattress and a mosquito net. Fires are lit around the camp, to ward off curious wildlife, and we settle around one of them, chatting amiably and listening to the various chirps and croaks of the surrounding bush. As my eyes adjust to the light of the rising moon and a faint outline of the Milky Way emerges, I spot two shapes moving a little beyond our beds. I point them out to Charles, who stares intently for a while and then exclaims, “Oh yes, those are hyenas!” The shapes disappear. “They will come back.”

Lying on my mattress that night, as armed wardens keep watch over the site, I am too distracted by the scene-stealing performance of the sky to keep a look-out for hyenas. Shooting stars regularly whizz across it, one particularly fat one falling to Earth like a downed rocket. Fully risen, the moon is so bright it’s like someone switched on a light. It seems to make the local wildlife rowdy — through the darkness come the saw-like calls of leopards, the deep bellowing rumbles of lions, the high-pitched chattering of hyenas and the harsh barks of baboons. When the

moon sets around 2am, the world falls silent. A universe of stars is revealed, the streaked band of the Milky Way now shining vivid and intense among them.

### Changing attitudes

Over a breakfast of strong coffee and fried eggs cooked on the fire, Charles tells me he stayed up all night, too transfixed by his surroundings to go to bed. He shows no sign of fatigue, his humour and ability to tell a cracking good story still intact, but perhaps it’s just as well that I’m leaving the reserve to learn about a final part of Norman Carr’s legacy.

On the edge of South Luangwa, separated from the park by the river, lies the town of Mfuwe. Kids in crisply ironed school uniforms cycle along the wide, dusty road running through it and women in patterned *chitenge* sarongs browse the market, moving between stalls selling sweet potatoes, corn, radios and Tupperware. I meet Thokozile Phiri Mwamba, wearing a bright *chitenge* over black jeans and Adidas trainers, in the shade of a mango tree just off the main street. Communications manager of the Time + Tide Foundation, Thokozile is part of a female-heavy team that builds on a scheme hatched by Carr to use funds generated by the park to provide educational opportunities for villagers living around it.

The foundation provides practical support in the form of student sponsorships and adult literacy programmes and, more radically,

Above: Thokozile Phiri Mwamba and members of the Time + Tide Foundation in Mfuwe town, near the southern entrance to the park



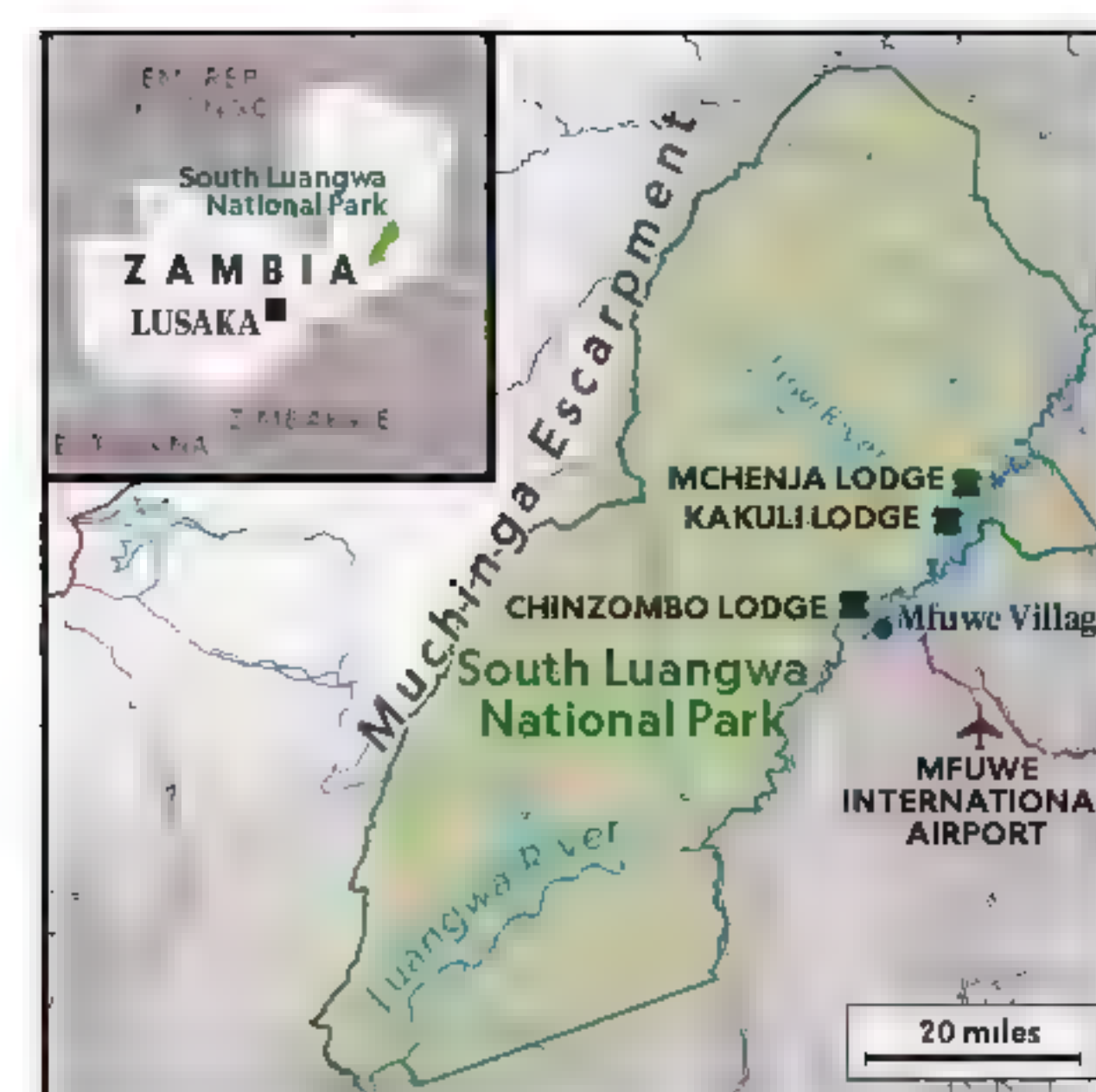


works to change negative attitudes about traditionally marginalised groups. At local Yosefe Primary School, children with special needs are integrated into regular education, to help develop their social skills and to stop other kids seeing them as ‘other’. “We want to promote more inclusivity and less stigma,” Thokozile says as she shows me around, gaggles of students running out of classrooms to come and say hello, their headmaster gamely attempting to usher them back inside. “I already see a lot of positive change.”

Female empowerment projects are run at the school, too, encouraging parents to keep their daughters in education longer and running courses in business management and public speaking. In a development that seems as groundbreaking now as Carr’s ideas were in his day, the foundation also champions positive masculinity, placing some of the responsibility for that empowerment on to men’s shoulders. “When women get stronger, some men are threatened,” Thokozile tells me. “We teach them that it’s not a bad thing if a woman does well.”

Charles had earlier told me that of the 15 Time + Tide guides working in South Luangwa, all were local but none were female. “We are pushing hard to change that,” he’d said. With his enthusiasm and Thokozile’s passion, it might come sooner rather than later — perhaps the guides leading walking safaris in South Luangwa in the future are the girls sitting in the classrooms of Yosefe today. □

Above: Herds of impala graze in the golden light of dusk, in a park that’s also home to puku — small, reddish antelope that look similar to impala



#### GETTING THERE & AROUND

There are no direct flights from the UK to the Zambian capital Lusaka. Emirates, Ethiopian Airlines, Kenya Airways, Qatar Airways and RwandAir fly via their respective hub cities. [emirates.com](http://emirates.com) [ethiopianairlines.com](http://ethiopianairlines.com) [kenya-airways.com](http://kenya-airways.com) [qatarairways.com](http://qatarairways.com) [rwandair.com](http://rwandair.com)

**Average flight time:** 14h.

From Lusaka, it’s a short flight with domestic airline Proflight Zambia to Mfuwe airport, 15 miles from the south entrance to South Luangwa National Park. [proflight-zambia.com](http://proflight-zambia.com)

**Average flight time:** 1h10m.

#### WHEN TO GO

Walking safaris are offered between May and November, and many lodges within the park open only during those months, shutting for the wet season. The end of dry season, October to November, is prime time for wildlife-spotting, with visibility improved by thinner vegetation and animals gathering around dwindling water sources. Boating safaris are available in February and March, when the river levels are at their highest. The destination is hot and sunny all year, with temperatures peaking in October and November (40C) and at their lowest in May (25C).

#### MORE INFO

[zambiatourism.com](http://zambiatourism.com)

*Zambia Safari Guide*, Bradt Guides. £19.99

#### HOW TO DO IT

Time + Tide has five camps in the park, including three — Mchenja, Kakuli and Chinzombo — along the Luangwa River in the south. Journeys by Design offers a six-night stay at the three camps from £6,379 per person, including accommodation, park and conservation fees, internal flights, transfers and all meals and activities, excluding international flights. [timeandtideafrica.com](http://timeandtideafrica.com) [journeysbydesign.com](http://journeysbydesign.com)



# JOURNEYS ACROSS AFRICA

Absolute Zambia Safaris is run and owned by Indigenous Zambians. We are happy to assist our clients in designing unique safaris that are off the beaten track, offered by the best and experienced tour operators. We handcraft life-changing tailor-made, private guided safaris and tours for Zambia and Southern Africa.



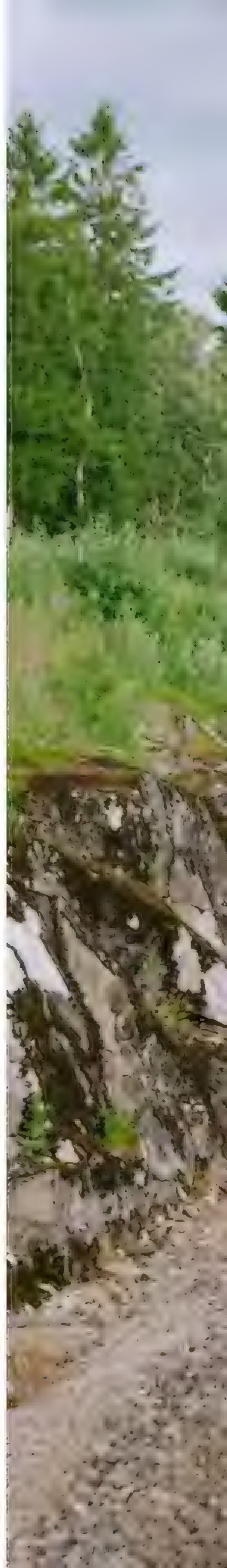
**OUR SERVICES:** Full range of all travel & tour services, 24/7 on-safari support, safari & tour packages, photographic safari and filming, accommodation booking, activities & excursions, airport meet & greet, all transfers, flight bookings, car hire & rentals, fully kitted camping vehicles, and events planning (meetings & conferences)



# SLOW TRAIN UNDER THE MIDNIGHT SUN

In high summer, the sun doesn't set in northern Norway, making it prime time for a unique rail adventure, following the tracks from the capital Oslo all the way into the Arctic Circle

WORDS: MONISHA RAJESH. PHOTOGRAPHS: MARC SETHI













## Black coffee warming my palms, I breathe in the smell of hot dogs rotating on the worktop stand and decide that now's not quite the time for one.

The attendant, Tor Helge, potters around the dining car, his whistling presence companionship enough as I look out onto the Gudbrandsdalslågen, one of Norway's longest rivers, its waters twinkling in the light. Like Christmas trees on stilts, pencil-thin pines fringe its banks and a sandy islet rises up like a backbone between the flow.

Whispering alongside, the train leans into a turn before we swing wide and I edge towards the window, spotting a handful of people fly-fishing for trout, pike and perch, waders up to their thighs. Hikers appear on a pathway and a group of cyclists glance sideways as we pass. The sky's a milky blue, sunshine glinting on the peaks of the Dovrefjell mountains — it's a classic summer scene. Only one thing's different: I glance down at my watch and it's 3.50am.

With a mild ache behind my eyes, I'm urging my body to adjust its circadian rhythms to the natural phenomenon of Norway's midnight sun. North of the Arctic Circle, from mid-May to mid-July, the sun stays above the horizon, with no distinction between night and day. During this period, Norwegians embrace the gift of time — and light — by hiking, fishing, climbing, sailing, sea kayaking and generally roaming around drinking and partying in the soft orange glow of 'night'.

Intrigued by the idea of groundhog daytime, I'm taking the sleeper train from the capital, Oslo, up to Trondheim on the 300-mile Dovre Railway. From Trondheim, I'll transfer onto the Nordland Railway, which weaves up the country for another 450 miles to Bodø (pronounced boo-der), the final station on the line, just north of the Arctic Circle.

The previous day, I arrived in Oslo expecting to find the city alive with noisy beer gardens and gourmet food trucks, and cyclists weaving between them in floaty dresses — but a ghost

town awaited. "Everyone leaves in July," said Fredrik, a waiter at a bookshop cafe. "Most people go to France or Italy or escape to their summer houses. For two to three weeks in July, it's dead here."

Fortunately, the station had a number of restaurants where I could linger until it was time to board the train. Departing promptly from platform four, the service creaked and groaned out of Oslo Central at 11pm, before it relaxed into the journey, an even thump-thump taking us behind warmly lit apartment blocks, the city's spread of green spaces dense and frequent. It wasn't long before we pulled east, where the area's wealth revealed itself in the form of detached, multi-levelled homes with Teslas parked in the driveways and boutique shops on the high streets.

By midnight, the clouds had darkened and stretched into indigo ripples, but on the horizon, a belt of orange refused to fade, eventually turning pink. As we passed the edge of the Vorma River, a white mist hovered above it until it widened into Lake Mjøsa, Norway's largest lake. Still as glass, it appeared silver in the twilight, the outline of fishing boats just visible on its surface. Unable to look away, I sat at the window eyeing the pink glow, determined not to lose it as it flashed in and out between rising mountain peaks until the train barrelled into a wild expanse of darkness and the lake vanished from view.

On any other night, I'd have taken myself off to bed, but even at 12.30am, the dining car was busy, passengers tuned into the summer vibe. Two young women shared a bottle of rosé, amusing each other with stories of terrible dates, while an elderly couple sipped beer, their matching Merrell sandals suggesting a walking trip ahead. Meanwhile, two dishevelled parents boarded with twin

The author on board the sleeper train

Previous pages: A 3am view from the train's last carriage on the sleeper service to Bodø







Clockwise from top:  
A promenade along the  
Nidelva river opposite  
Trondheim train station;  
a chef cuts fresh herbs at  
Lille Skansen restaurant,  
on the waterfront  
in Trondheim; fried  
sausage at the Britannia  
Hotel's breakfast buffet

toddlers asleep in buggies, their fat little feet bare in the heat. Just before 1am, I recognised a teen I'd seen in the bookshop cafe in Oslo — he was wrapped in his father's embrace on the platform at Brumunddal. The warm reunion seemed a fitting moment for me to turn in. Debating whether to pull down the blackout blind in my compartment, I finally left it open, too nervous to risk sleeping through to Trondheim and missing the scenery. Quiet, with barely a jolt, the service was one of the most comfortable sleeper trains I'd ever ridden. Still, at 3.20am, as we passed through Dovre National Park, I sacrificed my slumber to watch peach clouds beginning to warm the tops of mountains and reflect onto the lakes.

### Local source

It's 7am and golden light is flooding dewy meadows, with long shadows stretching over the train and halos of mist swirling in the valleys. I'm joined by Lars and Astrid, who are travelling to Trondheim for a weekend break of eating and walking — “before we have children and they ruin everything,” says Lars, as Astrid pulls a face. “Like Oslo, it'll be quiet,” she says, “but we like that.”

They tell me it's a different story in August, when chefs come from all over the country to cook at the Trøndelag Food Festival, and the crowds follow. The city is known as the food capital of Norway and has three Michelin-starred restaurants — Credo, Fagn and Speilsalen. This is another reason why I'm breaking up my journey with a night here.

“You should visit Sellanraa Bok & Bar,” says Astrid. “It's very seasonal and everything is from the surrounding region, so you'll get a taste of the local flavours.” She sketches directions to it in my notebook before spotting the convergence of railway tracks. “We're

here,” she says, sliding out from the table and wishing me a happy onward journey.

The coastal freshness slaps me awake as I cross the bridge over the Nidelva River into town, pausing to take in the promenade — a strip of six-storey buildings stretched out like a Dulux colour palette, sailboats tethered in the foreground. From here, it's a 10-minute walk to the Britannia Hotel, and I'm hoping my room is ready. As much as sleeper trains fulfil the fantasy of romance, they do come with a downside: for passengers returning home, it's no bother to arrive in the small hours and head straight off for a hot shower and breakfast. But for those of us who are strangers to a destination, perhaps waking less than refreshed, it can often mean mooching around with bags, killing time in coffee shops until check-in. Fortunately, my room is available and I sleep for a couple of hours before experiencing one of the greatest breakfasts of my life.

When it opened in 1870, the Britannia Hotel had a clear goal: to attract the upper-class Englishmen who'd introduced angling to Norwegian rivers in the 1820s. Known as the ‘salmon lords’, they brought with them the technique of fly-fishing, triggering the emergence of a number of luxury hotels to entice them towards the Trøndelag region, home to some of the densest populations of salmon in the country. I learn this from a chef in the hotel's Palmehaven restaurant, who gestures towards ribbons of the sweet smoked fish with lemon wedges tucked into the folds. More like a wedding banquet than a buffet, the breakfast here is celebrated as one of the best in Norway. I can see why as I look round at scrambled eggs whipped into peaks, curls of fat shrimp in dill sauce, cast-iron pots of shiitake sausage and plates of meatballs with ramson, a broad-leafed wild garlic.







There's a smell of salt on the air and nothing  
but the sound of the wind whipping as I turn  
slowly, taking in the view of hazy mountains  
that descend into waters of pure gold







Clockwise from top: Pull-down seats outside the sleeper compartments on the overnight train from Oslo to Trondheim; deep-fried truffle croquettes at LystPå restaurant in Bodø; customers chat beneath the array of pickled fruit and vegetables at Sellanraa Bok & Bar  
Previous pages: The midnight view from the mountain plateau of Keiservarden in Bodø

There are also comically large rounds of local cheeses on cake stands alongside rumpled bries and crumbly blues. There's cheese that's speckled, seeded, hard, soft, made from ewe's milk, cow's milk and goat's milk, then on the side, dollops of preserve, quince and jam. It's almost overwhelming.

I sit down with Olav Svarliaunet, a junior sous-chef who takes part in August's three-day food festival. "We only use local produce here and everything is labelled to show where it's from," he says. The hotel has its own farm, Braattan Gaard, about half an hour's drive away. It has more than 5,000 apple trees, which provide the cold-press juice for breakfast. "We get a lot of produce from the mountain village of Røros, two hours south of here, including eggs, cream, milk, butter and all our cured meats and fish," Olav says. With the exception of perhaps a few tropical fruits like pineapple, everything is Norwegian.

Trondheim has switched to summer mode and many of its restaurants are closed, but this gives me the chance to see more of the place. I amble along cobbled streets filled with walkers, wet retrievers trotting at their heels. It's unusually warm as I embark upon the Midtbyrunden, a 3.7-mile trail that meanders around the city centre following the Trondheim Fjord and Nidelva River. A beautiful route, it takes me over bridges and around docks, where swimmers yelp in the chilly waters. I linger in the wharf neighbourhood of Bakklandet, sipping an iced chilli chocolate milk from Dromedar Kaffebar before browsing a range of shops selling everything from artisan soap to cashmere blankets. Painted in soft pinks and sage greens, some of the timber houses look empty, their walls covered by trailing blooms of roses and their ledges lined with boxes of buttery yellow flowers.

By the end of the walk, I've worked off breakfast and decide to take Astrid's advice and seek out Sellanraa Bok & Bar. The menu is mostly vegetarian, featuring colourful plates of sliced hasselback carrots with baked shallots and turnips, most of which is sourced from nearby Grindal Farm. Inside, it's a cross between a bookshop and a pantry — the top shelves are lined with jars of oranges and chanterelles brewing in murky yellow brines, sitting alongside hardbacks of Elif Batuman's *The Idiot* and Albert Camus' *The Plague*. Over a plate of fresh shrimp and shaved fennel, I reflect how easy it's been to while away the day, grazing on small dishes between bursts of windy walks along the coast.

The journey north

The following evening, I'm on the platform just before 11pm to board the sleeper train to Bodø. On the horizon, the sun threatens to sink, but instead spreads outwards in a pool of mellow yellow, throwing a healthy glow onto passengers' cheeks. At this time of year, the trains are at capacity and I'd been unsuccessful in trying to book a sleeper carriage. I'd secured a ticket in what's called 'Premium Pluss', where wide seats recline up to 45 degrees and you're provided with blankets, pillows, a hot breakfast and unlimited hot drinks.

Within minutes, the sweaty fear of not being able to lie flat at any point of this leg of the journey has evaporated, and I'm snuggled up in what feels like the cosiest carriage on the train, my fellow passengers pulling on hoodies and watching films on their phones. Tor, the attendant from the previous leg, is back on board and only too pleased to demonstrate the nifty foot rests, side tables and reading lights. He takes my order for breakfast and directs me to the tail end of the train to see the tracks snake off into what's almost a sunset. From the



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Above: Walkers take a break by the water in the Bakklandet neighbourhood of Trondheim

back window, I watch as we curl around the edge of the Trondheim Fjord, its waters orange and pink. There's a sense of magic as the light deepens and intensifies, before simmering to a softness I've never witnessed before. A feeling of in-betweenness gets under my skin as I stand with one foot on either side of two carriages, watching the day not turn into night as our train crosses the joints and hinges of the land, waterways flowing in from all sides.

This Nordland line crosses 293 bridges and runs through 154 tunnels, much of which I miss as I doze off at 1am, waking five hours later as sunlight pours across the Ranfjorden, a wide-mouthed body of water that swings around the base of forested mountains, its green depths bubbling with life.

Once again, I take myself off to the dining car, the beating heart of every sleeper train, and over a hot salami sandwich, I get chatting to Ludwig Herder, who's been sleeping in the play area of the family carriage. A sailor for the coastguard, living in Tromsø, Ludwig has adamantly refused to fly for the past 15 years. When I ask about his choice of sleeping compartment, he looks sheepish and laughs, retying his pony tail as he gathers his thoughts. "Everyone has the time to travel in summer, so it gets very booked up. And it's impossible to get a sleeper compartment because you can't

just buy a single bed, you have to buy both the berths." He pulls out his phone and shows me a Norwegian Facebook group where passengers share their travelling dates to see if they can buddy up in compartments. "Despite my best efforts, I couldn't get one," he says.

Located 220 miles inside the Arctic Circle, Tromsø is at the top of the country. Here, both the midnight sun and the Northern Lights are at their finest. "My girlfriend likes to hike and I enjoy going skiing," Ludwig says. "In June, there was still more than six feet of powder to ski on at night." He gets off at Fauske station, from where it's a six-hour bus ride to Narvik and then a four-hour ride to Tromsø. With that journey ahead of him, I can't help but marvel at his dedication to being flight-free.

From my window seat, I try to breathe in the final sights of the trip — of deer bounding across fields, and fjords rushing past below. As towns flit by, I'm reminded again that it's the particular privilege of the train traveller to witness the intricate details of other people's lives: the workman repainting a church spire, the couple kissing on a platform, the patterns on kitchen curtains.

And then it's over. Just before 9am, we terminate at Bodø, and my train family and I disembark — fishing gear and bikes are unloaded and dogs happily stretch their legs.





The Lade Melja lighthouse  
in Trondheim, built in 1920

Within an hour, it's clear this is a junction town that most travellers pass through for its easy access to the outdoors: taking a ferry to the Lofoten Islands, hiking the glacier at Svartisen or fishing and scuba diving at Saltstraumen, home to the world's strongest maelstrom, or whirlpool. Feeling the cumulative lack of sleep, and having centred the majority of my trip on food, my own plans involve little more than a walk along the marina with an ice cream from the local van. I follow this up with a search for presents for my children, who'll have to make do with a compass and a stuffed toy moose. That is until I realise I'm travelling home by train and can take them a bag of baked *kanelboller* (plump knots of sticky cinnamon bread, dusted with sugar) from PåPir BibliotekBar, the cafe at Bodø's library.

After a walk around the town's parks, I'm geared up for dinner at Lystpå, a fine-dining restaurant, but a particularly relaxed one with throws and cushions. Served on slate plates are starters such as pan-fried scallops fizzing in mussel bisque and truffle croquettes followed by mains like perfectly seared reindeer. By the time I'm cracking into creme brulee and homemade doughnuts, that deep orange glow

I'm getting so used to here catches my eye; enriching and invigorating, it brings a sense of calm and joy. No wonder Norwegians stay out all night basking in its goodness. Michał Młynarczyk, who runs the restaurant, tells me now's the time to visit Keiservarden, one of the area's most popular hiking destinations. I'm ready to walk off the meal, but at 11pm? "There's no better time — everyone does it," he says.

And so I set off, crossing paths with runners and families as I begin the ascent of Veten hill, the skies burning as though the horizon's set alight. Young children carrying sticks and leaves from their hikes skip past me, hopping over tree roots, and in just under an hour, I've reached the top of Keiservarden mountain plateau, where dogs run around in the wind and climbers stare out at the soft outline of the Lofoten and Steigen islands. There's a smell of salt in the air and nothing but the sound of the wind whipping as I turn slowly, taking in the view of hazy mountains that descend into waters of pure gold. Here, in the far north, the midnight sun turns dark red and I stare at it dipping behind the clouds for a few moments. I turn and make my way back down the track at 1am, just as the sun begins to rise again. ☐



#### GETTING THERE & AROUND

Norwegian Airlines flies directly from Gatwick to Oslo multiple times a day. Norwegian and Scandinavian Airlines both fly directly to Oslo from Manchester, too. [norwegian.com](http://norwegian.com) [flysas.com](http://flysas.com)

**Average flight time:** 2h.

By train from the UK, board an evening Eurostar from St Pancras to Brussels and stay the night. Take an early train from Brussels Midi to Cologne, arriving around 8am. Board the next service to Hamburg, arriving at lunchtime, and take a late-afternoon train to Copenhagen, which arrives after 9pm. Book via Eurostar and Deutsche Bahn. [eurostar.com](http://eurostar.com) [int.bahn.de/en](http://int.bahn.de/en) Spend a night in Copenhagen then take the 9.30am train arriving in Gothenburg at 1.20pm. Transfer onto the 2.15pm service, which arrives in Oslo at 5.44pm. Book tickets at [omio.co.uk](http://omio.co.uk)

#### WHEN TO GO

To make the most of the midnight sun, travel between mid-May and mid-July. Temperatures are cool in the north, though, reaching highs of only 16-17C with lows of 8-9C. It can be humid and rainy, too, so pack plenty of layers and waterproof clothing.

#### WHERE TO STAY

Britannia Hotel, Trondheim.  
Doubles from 2,695 NOK (£202), B&B. [britannia.no](http://britannia.no)  
Quality Hotel Ramsalt, Bodø.  
Doubles from 1,206 NOK (£90), B&B. [strawberryhotels.com](http://strawberryhotels.com)

#### MORE INFO

[visittrondheim.no](http://visittrondheim.no)  
[visitbodo.com](http://visitbodo.com)  
[vy.no](http://vy.no)

#### HOW TO DO IT

Byway offers a flight-free, 17-day round-trip by train from London to Oslo, Trondheim and Bodø, via Germany and Denmark, including all hotels and train tickets. Prices start from £1,788 per person. [byway.travel](http://byway.travel)





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# GO EAST

IN THE REMOTE EASTERN CORNER OF THE TINY HIMALAYAN NATION OF BHUTAN LIES A LAND LITTLE VISITED BY TRAVELLERS. THOSE WHO MAKE THE JOURNEY HERE WILL DISCOVER A UNIQUE REGION OF SOARING MOUNTAINS, IMPOSING MONASTIC FORTRESSES AND DIVERSE CULTURES

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHS: MATT DUTILE











A Buddhist kingdom lying in the Himalayas between China and India, Bhutan has some 700,000 residents, most of whom live in the cities of Thimphu and Paro in the west. The six *dzongkhags* (districts) farthest east are some of the least populated areas of the country, and it takes at least two days by car over winding roads to reach them. This is a region of unique cultures and traditions and a great place to try local Bhutanese cuisine, such as *ema datshi* (a fiery combination of chillies and cheese) over rice. It's home to swaying paddies and deep green valleys, like the one overlooking the Dangme Chhu River, which is lined by stone distance markers for drivers. A particular highlight is the 16th-century *naktsheng*, or traditional manor house, in Dungkar village, which is now a cultural museum looked after by red-robed monks.













The semi-nomadic Brokpa people live in the high-altitude villages of Merak and Sakteng in the easternmost corner of Bhutan. Many still practise traditional herding, travelling with their yaks to grazing plains at altitudes as high as 4,500m during summer. Come autumn, they move down to shepherd camps where they continue to watch over their animals. Thick woollen jackets, made of yak or sheep wool, help protect Brokpa men from the elements when shepherding and have become part of their unique costume. Brokpa women wear colourful jackets, often intricately embroidered and decorated with precious metals and stones. There are no hotels in the area, but families — like the Kezang Chodens in Merak, a village of stone-and-timber houses — often welcome guests to stay in their homes.







From the East-West Highway bisecting Bhutan, a single-lane road snakes along the Kuri Chhu River past sub-tropical bamboo forests, fear-inducing suspension bridges and small villages where young boys play games using large metal darts. Little *chorten* (temples) line clefts in crags along the road or sit behind mural-painted gates and are filled with prayer wheels as tokens to remember loved ones. A day's travel along the road lies Khoma, famous for its production of *kishuthara*, a type of patterned silk *kira* (the long skirt that forms part of the national dress worn by Bhutanese women). They're crafted on looms in the weavers' homes or in collective textile workshops around the village and are so intricate, they can take more than a year to make.













A half-hour drive from Khoma, the imposing Lhuentse Dzong comes into view on a ridgeline above the surrounding landscape. These monastic fortresses are found across Bhutan, serving as religious, governmental and military hubs. Inside are administrative offices that help run the district, temples filled with monks, and courtyards where *tshechu* (religious festivals ) are held annually. The drums used in these festivals are often kept hanging in the buildings' mural-filled rooms. Monks from the *dzongs* are often engaged by local people to visit their homes, traversing a valley filled with troops of macaque monkeys to carry out rituals aimed at ensuring health and prosperity. The ceremonies often involve the monks playing horns, banging drums and performing chants.







The town of Trashigang serves as the gateway for travels around the east, each district moving outwards from it like the spokes of a bicycle wheel. Vendors in small roadside stands hawk everything from fizzy drinks, water and crisps to sandals and Pokémon trading cards. The region's only hotels, with warm showers and large beds, are found here, too. It's a welcome respite from life on the road, but visiting this part of the country is at its most memorable when venturing beyond the town. It's then that travellers can have such unique experiences as staying with a local family, spending frosty evenings watching the Milky Way passing over the gates of a temple or simply admiring the homemade patterned jackets of Brokpa women in Sakteng. Ultimately, it's the people that make this part of the world such a distinct place to explore.





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PHOTO CREDIT: BRENDAN DELZIN



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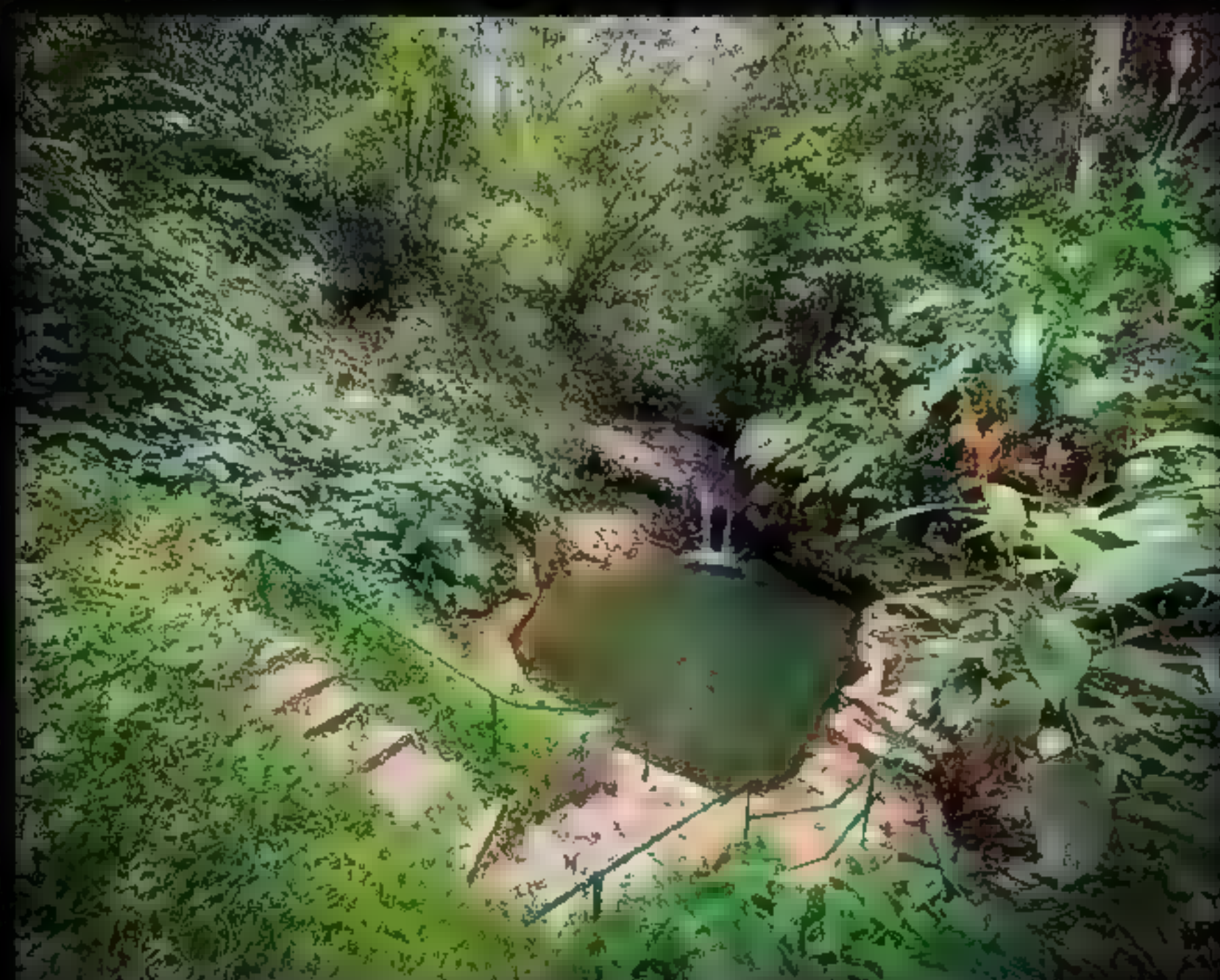


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The Big Trip

# The Philippines

IN THIS ARCHIPELAGO OF OVER 7,000 ISLANDS, BAMBOO  
BOATS CAN TAKE YOU ALMOST ANYWHERE — A NEON-  
STREAKED CITY, AN UNDERWATER SHIPWRECK OR A FOREST  
VILLAGE WHERE FIREFLIES TWINKLE WITH THE STARS

WORDS: SARAH GILLESPIE

IMAGE: AWL IMAGES





Filipinos have long referred to their country as a pearl. And yes, you can find pearls here — but that’s not the only reason why. It has everything to do with the Philippines’ natural riches: among them, jade-green rice terraces, looming limestone mountains and sunsets so vivid they seem to set the sea ablaze. Add to this the country’s cities, with oceanside skyscrapers, a diverse street food scene and charming, mini-bus-like jeepneys, and you have the makings of a world-class break.

Because the Philippines has no mainland to speak of, most trips here tend to involve hopping between some of its 7,641 islands and islets. Those craving a more laidback beach getaway are well catered for: in popular destinations like Palawan, *bangkas* (bamboo

outrigger boats) line up by the shores, ready to whisk you to your choice of sandbar. Some are backed by barefoot bars, some are famous for snorkelling, while others are reclaimed by the water at high tide.

But the best visits to these islands include time spent inland. Filipinos flock to the cities of the Central Visayas, where ancestral houses and museums tell tales of national heroes — revolutionaries whose names are uttered with a reverence usually reserved for saints. On less frequented landmasses like the Bicol Peninsula, on Luzon island, you’ll find forests crisscrossed with streams and dotted with crystalline lagoons, and villages built from bamboo and wreathed in woodsmoke. Motorised tricycles putter from

one of these villages to the next, carrying anything from chickens and pigs to an entire family of eight.

Diving opens up a whole new world beneath the waves, too, where coral chapels house congregations of angelfish and wrasse, while shoals of silvery sardines dance above. Some sites are frequented by bigger beasts — barracudas, manta rays, whale sharks and thresher sharks — and advanced diving credentials can bring them into view, while also giving access to the Philippines’ renowned shipwrecks. Down at those depths, you might discover creatures such as the ghost pipefish, which make their homes in the banks of black coral. And, who knows, perhaps you’ll find a shining pearl or two.





### ITINERARY ONE

1. Mactan
2. Cebu
3. Panglao Island
4. Bohol
5. Dumaguete
6. Apo Island

## ITINERARY ONE CENTRAL VISAYAS

**Start:** Mactan • **Finish:** Apo Island  
**Distance:** 183 miles • **Time:** 16 days

The Philippines can be divided into three areas: Luzon, the biggest, northernmost island, home to the capital, Manila; the Visayas, an archipelago scattered at its centre; and Mindanao, the second-largest island to the south. The Central Visayas are the heart of the country, with as much culture and history as leisure and adventure.

Begin on Mactan island. Lapu-Lapu City is named after the 16th-century chief who ordered the killing of explorer Ferdinand Magellan, whose arrival paved the way for Spanish rule. To learn more about the country's past, cross the 5.5-mile Cebu-Cordova Link Expressway to Cebu island, where history looms large in both Catholic churches and capiz shell-encrusted ancestral houses.

Reserve about a week for both. Then, the real island-hopping begins, with fast and frequent ferries making transfers easy. Take one to Bohol island; once there, drive straight to Tagbilaran city, on Bohol's southern shore, and across a bridge to Panglao Island. After a couple of days recharging on Panglao, retrace your way to Bohol to explore its limestone hills. Beyond lies Negros island, where Dumaguete city is the jumping-off point for discovering Apo Island.

### HIGHLIGHTS

#### MACTAN

Seaside resorts line Mactan's southeastern shore — as do dive shops, positioned to make the most of a vertiginous reef wall that's home to sea snakes and green turtles. Lapu-Lapu City, which covers most of the island, is the Philippines' guitar-making capital: take a tour of Alegre Guitar Factory, which sells instruments made from tropical wood. [sidive.com](https://www.sidive.com) [facebook.com/alegreguitarph](https://www.facebook.com/alegreguitarph)

#### CEBU

Ferdinand Magellan spent his final days on Cebu, one of the region's biggest islands. This is where you'll find Magellan's Cross, planted by the explorer after his arrival, and the Santo Niño de Cebu. While they were still on good terms, Magellan gifted local tribespeople this carved wooden image of the baby Jesus, now housed in the Basilica del Santo Niño. It's honoured every January during Sinulog, a folk dance festival. [sinulogfestival.com](https://www.sinulogfestival.com)

#### PANGLAO ISLAND

There's a beach to suit every visitor to Panglao. While most like to party on Alona, the local favourite is Dumaluán, a quiet stretch of powdery coral sand. If neither appeals, take a boat trip to the round island of Balicasag. On the way there, you may spot bottlenose and Risso's dolphins. [panglaotours.com](https://www.panglaotours.com)

#### BOHOL

Bohol's undulating Chocolate Hills are one of the Philippines' most photographed sights, but they're not the island's only attraction. Spend the night in a *nipa* palm hut in the forest village of Loboc, paddleboarding by day and firefly-watching by night.

#### DUMAGUETE

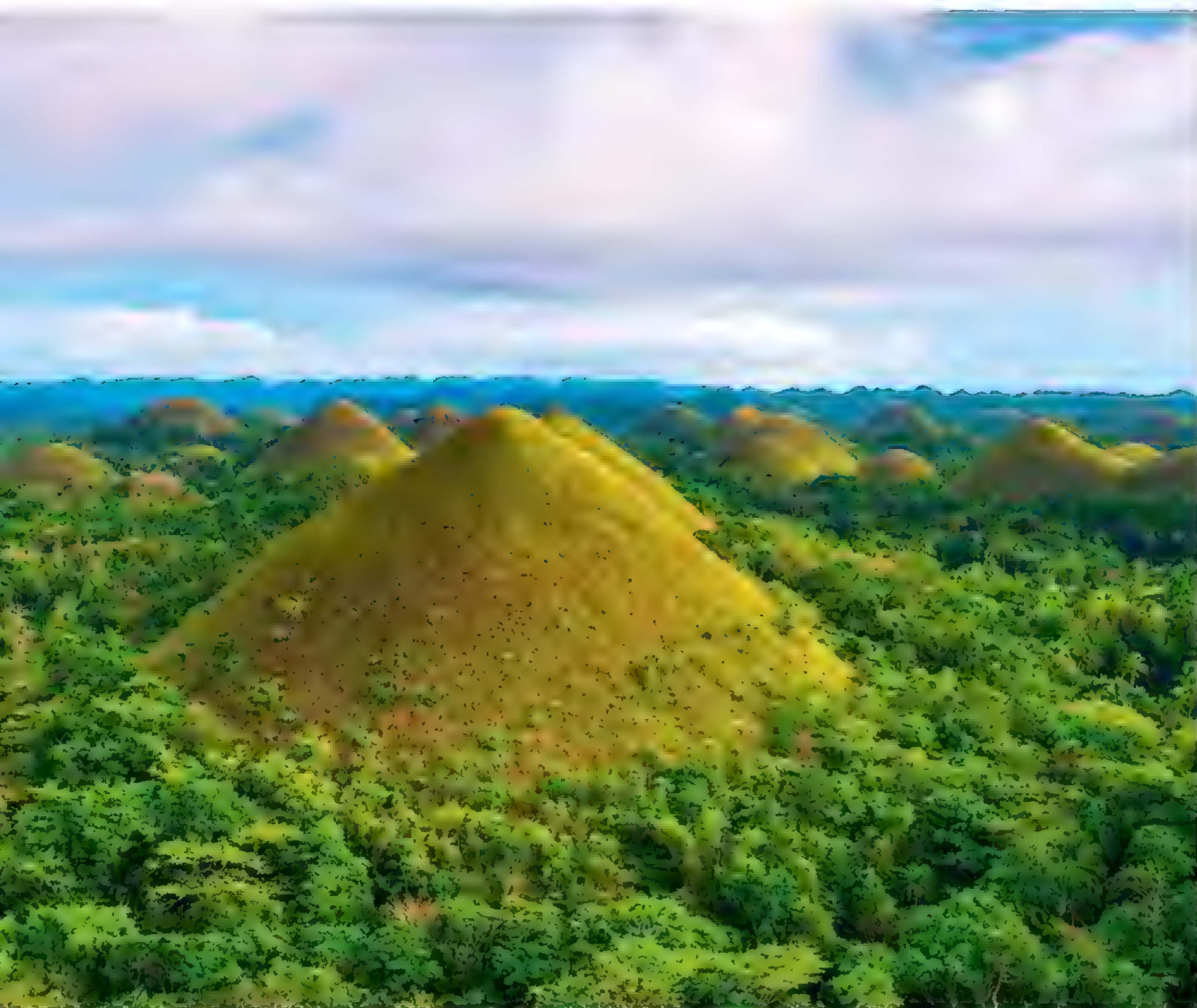
This university town sits on the east shore of Negros, an island known for its tangy *inasal* (barbecued chicken). Try it at Jo's Chicken Inatô, then head to Lab-as Seafood Restaurant for *liempo kinilaw*, vinegar-cured tuna chunks topped with crispy pork belly. Spend the evening bar-hopping along Rizal Boulevard, sampling rums made from Negros sugarcane.

#### APO ISLAND

This coral cornucopia is one of the country's best-loved dive spots. Beginner-friendly sites include the Chapel, where moray eels slither among sea fans and leather corals. For experienced divers, Coconut Point has schools of trevally and the occasional hawksbill turtle. [facebook.com/scubaventures.dumaguete](https://www.facebook.com/scubaventures.dumaguete)

**HOW TO DO IT:** Bamboo Travel has a 16-day Mactan to Apo Island trip from £3,495 per person based on two sharing, including flights from London, transfers and accommodation on a B&B basis. [bambootravel.co.uk](https://www.bambootravel.co.uk) For more information, visit [visitcentralvisayas.com](https://www.visitcentralvisayas.com)





Q&amp;A

### Jimmy Sy, owner of Cebu's Jesuit House Museum



#### WHAT'S A FILIPINO ANCESTRAL HOUSE?

A home owned and maintained by the same family for several generations, which reflects the respect with which Filipinos preserve the memory of their ancestors. It could be a *bahay na bato* ('house of stone'), a type of building dating from the Spanish colonial period, or inspired by *nipa* (palm) houses. Styles also include tropical modern and even art deco.

#### WHAT'S THE STORY OF CEBU'S JESUIT HOUSE?

It's believed to have been built in 1730 to house Jesuit missionaries, who were later expelled by King Charles III of Spain in 1768. In the 1960s, the house was bought by my father, Don Nicanor Sy, owner of Ho Tong Hardware in Cebu City. While attending a Jesuit university in Manila, I discovered the history of our 'warehouse' at the library. In 2010, I opened it as an ancestral house for the public, although it can be challenging to maintain the decaying wood posts and find the right expertise for conservation.

#### WHAT ARE SOME OTHER FILIPINO ANCESTRAL HOUSES WORTH VISITING?

In the province of Cebu, I recommend visiting the Casa Gorordo Museum and the CarCar City Museum. There are also nice ancestral houses in Taal, Calabarzon and in Iloilo, in the Western Visayas. [facebook.com/1730jesuithouse](https://facebook.com/1730jesuithouse) [casagorordomuseum.org](https://casagorordomuseum.org)

From top: Bohol's undulating Chocolate Hills; a street scene in the university town of Dumaguete

Previous pages: View of Bacuit Bay from El Nido, Palawan archipelago



1. Puerto Princesa
2. Honda Bay
3. Mount Magarwak
4. Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park
5. El Nido
6. Coron Bay



**Start:** Puerto Princesa • **Finish:** Coron Town  
**Distance:** 310 miles • **Time:** 14 days

Although a map might convince you it's one giant mass of land, Palawan is a quintessential island-hopping destination. Around 1,780 islets are scattered around the shores of Palawan Island — the archipelago's biggest by far — ranging from jagged peaks to blinding white sandbars. But it's the sea itself, and what lies within, that truly dazzles.

The best place to start is the provincial capital of Puerto Princesa, on Palawan Island. It faces Honda Bay, a smattering of islands that sink and reemerge with the ebb and flow of tides. Riding a bus through Palawan Island's interior, you'll find bamboo villages full of crowing cockerels, set against the silhouette of indigo mountains. It's a fine taster for the UNESCO-listed Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park, which draws visitors from the Cabayugan River's brackish mouth into a shadowy cathedral of caves.

Palawan's northeastern tip is a limestone wonderland, its chiselled karsts attracting climbers, kayakers and photographers. From here, take a multi-day boat trip to Coron Town, your last stop and base for reaching the waters of Coron Bay. It's a world-renowned wreck-diving destination: Japanese warships lie in shallow graves, with coral and sea turtles claiming their rusting hulls.





## HIGHLIGHTS

### PUERTO PRINCESA

Palawan's capital is your base for the first few stops of this itinerary. Pay a visit to the Palawan Heritage Center, an interactive museum that houses both ancient artifacts and modern arts and crafts. In the evening, head to the seafront Baywalk promenade, where you'll find a variety of laid-back, family-owned restaurants and bars. Don't miss the Palawan honey-infused beer at Palaweño Brewery, the Philippines' first female-owned craft brewery, a 20-minute walk into town. [puertoprincesatourism.com](http://puertoprincesatourism.com) [palawenobrewery.com](http://palawenobrewery.com)

### HONDA BAY

The islets in Honda Bay, north east of Puerto Princesa, are blessed with biodiversity. On an island-hopping day tour from the city, operator Corazon Travel & Tours will have you swim among horned sea stars, damselfish and iridescent wrasse, pausing for a picnic lunch of freshly caught fish. On the larger islands, coconut vendors ply their trade on many beaches and will gladly hack open a freshly fallen fruit for you to drink from. [toursbycorazon.com](http://toursbycorazon.com)

### MOUNT MAGARWAK

The beginner-friendly trek up Mount Magarwak — a cluster of hills between Honda Bay and the taller peaks of Puerto Princesa — is best done as a half-day trip from the city. Most guides will pick you up before sunrise; this way, you'll reach the summit in time to see the sun's first golden rays skim the bay below. On the way up, you'll encounter native ironwood and katmon trees, as well as some of Palawan's 445 species of butterfly. [toursbycorazon.com](http://toursbycorazon.com)

### PUERTO PRINCESA SUBTERRANEAN RIVER NATIONAL PARK

In this national park on the western coast of Palawan Island, an underground river winds for five miles through a mountain. Small-boat tours from the nearby village of Sabang take you up to its halfway point, gliding through echoing caves where bats chatter overhead. Although most travellers will visit on an organised day trip from Puerto Princesa, it's worth staying overnight in Sabang to explore the surrounding forest, home to endemic species such as the Palawan peacock pheasant and Palawan porcupine. [undergroundriver.puertoprincesa.ph](http://undergroundriver.puertoprincesa.ph)

### EL NIDO

This town is the base for visits to the Bacuit Archipelago — 45 craggy limestone outcrops that rise from the sea like mountains. To escape the day-trippers, it's worth booking a tour through an operator such as Tao, which takes you to Coron Town for several days of snorkelling in the furthest-flung islands, eating and sleeping by the sea in bamboo huts. [taophilippines.com](http://taophilippines.com)

### CORON BAY

During the closing stages of the Second World War, the US Air Force launched a surprise attack on 12 Japanese warships anchored in Coron Bay, sinking them in a matter of hours. Their wrecks — particularly that of the *Okikawa Maru*, with its cavernous propeller room and resident population of neon nudibranchs — are now popular locations for experienced divers. [cortodivers.com](http://cortodivers.com)

**HOW TO DO IT:** Bamboo Travel offers a 14-day Puerto Princesa to Coron trip from £3,995 per person based on two sharing, including flights from London, transfers and accommodation on a B&B basis. [bambootravel.co.uk](http://bambootravel.co.uk) For more information, visit [palawantourismcouncil.com](http://palawantourismcouncil.com)



## EYEWITNESS

## FORGED BY FIRE

**In the Bicol Peninsula, in the south east of Luzon island, the region's volcanic soil supports a cottage handicraft industry that's benefitting local communities, one handicraft at a time**

The people of Bicol are accustomed to danger. For centuries they've lived in the shadow of four active volcanoes on this peninsula, which juts out on the southeastern end of Luzon, the Philippines' largest and most populous island. The tallest volcano, Mayon, is said to be home to Gugurang, the supreme god of Bicolano mythology. It's this god who's praised — or blamed — for Bicol's tempestuous moods: the heat, the monsoons, the typhoons, the eruptions.

Still, the Bicolanos stay. Modern disaster-monitoring methods have made the region far safer. But what's perhaps more important to residents is the fertile soil, which supports fields of taro (a root crop) and forests of coconut palms and pili trees (grown for their nuts) — as well as a community of local craftspeople, who I'm here to meet.

I get acquainted with this soil at the entrance to the PhilCeramics in Tiwi municipality, situated in the centre of the peninsula, where earth from Mount Malinao — a potentially active volcano — drops through a filtering machine to produce a glistening clay. A studio space and shop, PhilCeramics was established with government funds in 1994 to support the centuries-old pottery industry in Tiwi. Potters create dozens of works a day here, destined for shops in Manila or commissioned as wedding gifts.

Since 2019, they've also offered lessons to visitors. Inside, potter Thoy Colina slaps a lump of clay onto his wheel for me to play with, then adjusts his bandana, as if readying himself for the mess to come. He's right to do so; although I've tried pottery before, I'm not prepared for clay of this purity. It slips through my fingers like quicksilver, and soon, my attempted vase looks more like a clam. Thoy steps in to fix it, his fingers barely moving yet commanding the clay with ease — this is second nature to him.

Next it's on to the abacá-stripping station in the cultural centre on the shores of Sumlang Lake, a man-made body of water an hour's drive south. A native plant from the banana family, abacá grows all over Bicol, its stalks yielding strong, hemp-like fibres. The Sumlang Lake centre was set up to promote Bicolano abacá weavers and allow visitors to see them at work.

"The first abacá industries were set up to make rope in the early 20th century, during the American occupation," says guide Liezel Mascariñas, as weaver Alex Nebreja yanks an abacá stalk through an iron clamp to reveal blonde threads. He invites me to do the same, but the stalk refuses to budge. "The Americans realised it's resistant to saltwater, as well as tough," Liezel adds, as the fibrous strip suddenly shifts, banging my fingers painfully.

I stop 40 minutes down the road for lunch at Cafe Molave and Souvenirs in Tabaco City, where Ness Araojo runs the

handicrafts side. She employs Bicolanos, mostly former housewives, to make bags from abacá and seagrass, which grows abundantly in Bicol's flood-prone areas. "It makes me happy," she tells me with an almost religious fervour. "I start at 7am; I should stop at 5pm, but at 7pm I'm still working. What else am I going to do? Put my feet up?"

Her words sound familiar. As the daughter of a Filipina seamstress myself, I've seen how adversity ushers in creativity. I find myself wondering whether the talent of Bicolanos is due to the daily uncertainty of living with volcanoes — the personification of diamonds created under pressure.

Recently, there have been political as well as geophysical rumblings. After lunch, I head back north to the town of Baao, where I meet Bernadette 'Bidi' De Los Santos at the entrance to her cafe, shop and workshop, the BidiBidi Cafe. I hear barks coming from a pen in a corner: "That's Donald Trump, Joe Biden and Kofi Annan," Bidi says pointing to the dogs, with a laugh that shakes her tiny frame.

Inside is a cacophony of embroidered bags, quilts and shirts, all bearing a similar motif — a woman's face festooned with flowers. But something else catches my eye: a cardboard cutout of 2022 Philippine presidential candidate (and Bicolana) Leni Robredo. "My place was the Leni Robredo campaign headquarters for this area," explains Bidi. "We held fundraising events, like dinners and concerts." The campaign was unsuccessful, ultimately ending in a victory for Ferdinand 'Bongbong Marcos', son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

It's just one example of Bidi's engagement with her local community, which began in 2017. "I noticed the farmers' wives didn't do much," she says. "From the time they plant the crops until harvest, there's not much activity that will help their income." She thought of teaching them the skills she'd learned at school back in the 1970s: hand embroidery, crochet, loom weaving and basket weaving.

More than 100 women now work for Bidi, around 15 in the on-site studio. I peer inside and see stacks of seagrass and recycled denim; in between, women work at pedal-operated Singer sewing machines. One is embroidering jean pockets with the flowery female faces, and Bidi tells me there are 12 designs in total. "They're in opposition to the 12 disciples, who were all men," she says, surveying her empire of embroidery. "Those who wrote the Bible must have been macho." She may have known defeat in the past, but it's good to see she hasn't lost her sense of humour.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Philippine Airlines has daily flights from Manila to Bicol. Bicol Beyond offers bespoke Bicol craft tours from 3,000 PHP (£43) for a group of five. [philippineairlines.com](http://philippineairlines.com) [bicolbeyond.com](http://bicolbeyond.com)





The rice paddies of the Bicol Peninsula, with Mount Mayon in the distance  
Below from left: A handmade basket made in Bicol; an artisan shapes abacá into wickerwork





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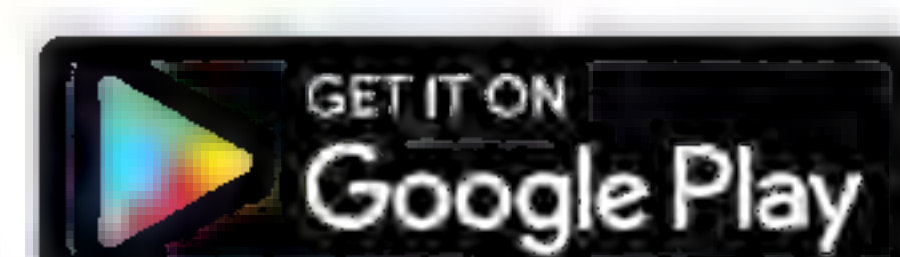
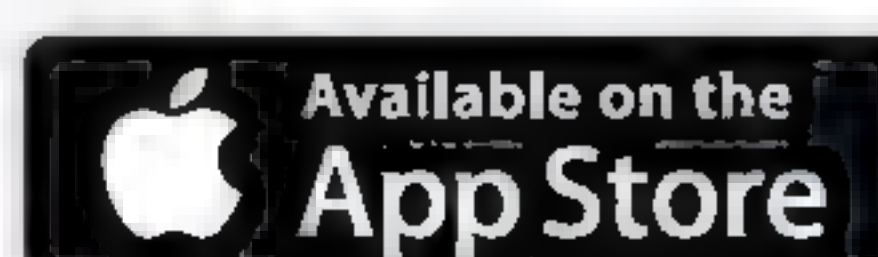
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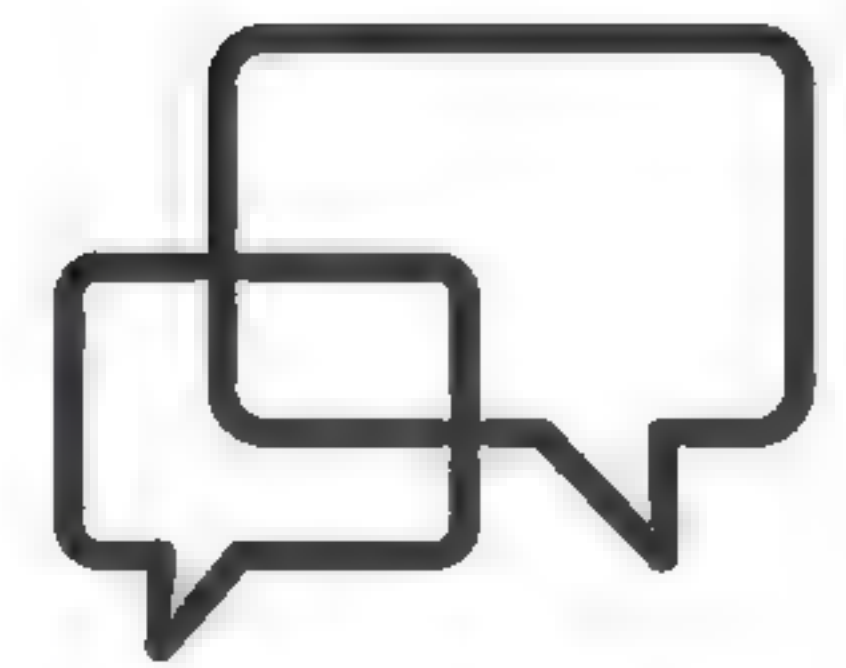
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An aerial view of Manila's skyline



### LANGUAGES IN THE PHILIPPINES In numbers

175

The number of native languages spoken in the Philippines according to Ethnologue, an annually updated catalogue of all the world's known languages. The three most-spoken are Filipino (Tagalog), Cebuano and Ilocano

48

The number of native Philippine languages listed as endangered by Ethnologue. These include Abellen Aytalanga, estimated to have only a few thousand remaining speakers

## 14 HOURS IN MANILA

### MORNING

Begin by renting a bamboo bike and exploring the walled city of Intramuros, Manila's seat of government during Spanish colonial rule. At its heart is Manila Cathedral, designed by Fernando Ocampo. Its pineapple finials are said to represent the death and rebirth of Christ but could apply to the structure itself: first built in 1571, it's now in its eighth iteration after centuries of war and earthquakes. Pedal north west to Fort Santiago, where Filipino national hero José Rizal — an activist during Spanish rule — was imprisoned before his execution. [bambike.com](http://bambike.com)

### AFTERNOON

Have a lunch of Spanish-Filipino cuisine at Ilustrado. Its paella is given a Manileño twist with annatto (a condiment derived from the seeds of the achiote tree) and eggs. Spend the rest of the afternoon museum-hopping around Rizal Park. The collection of Indigenous artefacts at the National Museum of Anthropology includes Ifugao textiles, a Maranao musical instrument set and documents written in the Philippines' pre-colonial alphabet. At the main hall of the National Museum of Fine Arts, you'll find Juan Luna's Spoliarium, considered one of the greatest paintings by a Filipino artist. [facebook.com/ilustradorerestaurant](https://facebook.com/ilustradorerestaurant) [nationalmuseum.gov.ph](http://nationalmuseum.gov.ph)

### EVENING

Cross the Pasig River to Binondo, the world's oldest Chinatown, established in 1594. The Philippines' Chinese settlers have influenced the national cuisine, resulting in dishes with a distinct fusion flavour. Head to Ongpin Mañosa to try three types of *pancit* (stir-fried noodles): *bihon*, *canton* and *sotanghon*, which indicate rice, wheat and glass noodles. Head on to Shanghai Fried Siopao for *siopao* (a sweeter take on *xiaolongbao* soup dumplings) and New Po Heng Lumpia House for *lumpia* (minced meat spring rolls). [facebook.com/shanghaifriedsiopao](https://facebook.com/shanghaifriedsiopao)

### NIGHT

Leave Binondo after 9pm to avoid rush hour and grab a taxi to Makati, Manila's glitzy business and party district. Alamat gastropub is the place to sample a rotating range of Filipino craft beers, along with *pulutan* (bar food) such as *sisig* (grilled pork jowl). A short walk away, follow up with cocktails at Run Rabbit Run, an Alice in Wonderland-themed bar that's part industrial shipping container, part apothecary box. The bartenders use native ingredients such as calamansi juice, sampaguita flower extract and Don Papa rum, from Bacolod. [instagram.com/alamatfilipinocuisine](https://instagram.com/alamatfilipinocuisine) [runrabbit.run](http://runrabbit.run)

1937

The year Filipino was adopted as the national language. It was the Philippines' first: from the colonial era up until that point, the country had only officially recognised Spanish and English

1 IN 3

The approximate proportion of Filipino words that originated from Spanish, a result of over three centuries of colonisation. Despite this, less than 0.5% of Filipinos speak Spanish, which is no longer an official language

55%

The proportion of Filipinos who speak English, which remains one of the country's most commonly used languages alongside Filipino.

It's a legacy of the US colonial period, which began after Spain's defeat in the Spanish-American War of 1898 and ended in 1946





Left: Diving at Apo Island, one of the country's most popular dive spots

# A practical guide to visiting the Philippines

## What do I need to take with me?

As with all tropical countries, bring sunglasses, a hat, insect repellent and plenty of sunscreen. The sea can get choppy, so stock up on motion sickness tablets. On small-boat trips, bring a waterproof jacket and dry bags to keep your electronic devices safe.

## Where can I get local currency?

The cheapest and easiest way to get Philippine pesos is from an ATM using a specialist travel card. ATMs are common in cities but rare on small islands, so get all the money you need before an excursion. Break large notes at the earliest opportunity; most businesses are cash-only and many don't give change.

## How frequent are transfers between islands?

Domestic flights and ferries are fast, cheap and frequent, but you'll still need to book in advance during the high season (December-February). If day-tripping to smaller islands, be aware that many passenger boats stop operating in the late afternoon.

## Do I need a diving licence?

Most dive shops will ask for one when you book a dive package; these days, you can store a digital version on your phone. Those without a licence can do a fully supervised 'discovery dive', but only down to 12 metres — too shallow for most wrecks but acceptable for many reefs.

## How can I keep safe in the ocean?

Some sites have strong currents and should only be tackled by experienced divers, plus it's crucial not to attempt entering a wreck without the required qualifications. Wear reef shoes for snorkelling, and generally keep an eye on your feet: lionfish and sea urchins live in shallow water.

## Are there areas to avoid?

Due to the threat of terrorism by insurgent groups, the FCDO advises against travel to the Mindanao region, excluding Camiguin, Dinagat and the Siargao Islands. It's rare for terrorists to operate outside this region; as such, the rest of the country is safe to visit. 

## GETTING THERE & AROUND

Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific and Qatar Airways all offer one-stop daily flights to Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport and Mactan-Cebu International Airport from several UK airports. [singaporeair.com](https://www.singaporeair.com) [cathaypacific.com](https://www.cathaypacific.com) [qatarairways.com](https://www.qatarairways.com)

**Average flight time:** 19h.

Philippine Airlines and Cebu Pacific offer domestic flights from most airports in the Philippines.

[philippineairlines.com](https://www.philippineairlines.com)  
[cebupacificair.com](https://www.cebupacificair.com)

2GO Travel operates long-haul domestic ferry trips. Ceres Liner runs intercity buses. [travel.2go.com.ph](https://www.travel.2go.com.ph) [ceresliner.com](https://www.ceresliner.com)

Hop in a tricycle taxi (motorbike with attached passenger cab) for day trips; it may be more practical to hire one if you're going to need it for the whole day. If the heat is too much, taxis are a comfy, air-conditioned alternative.

## WHEN TO GO

Generally, the Philippines' dry season runs from January to April, with highs of around 30-34C. After that, humidity levels rise, with the typhoon season in effect from July to October. There are regional variations, however, so it's best to check the areas you want to visit.

## MORE INFO

[philippines.travel](https://www.philippines.travel)

*Rough Guide to the Philippines.* £18.99

## HOW TO DO IT

Audley Travel offers a 16-day island-hopping tour from £3,840 per person, including flights, transfers, accommodation and some excursions. The itinerary includes Manila, Dumaguete, Siquijor, Bohol and Panglao. [audleytravel.com](https://www.audleytravel.com)





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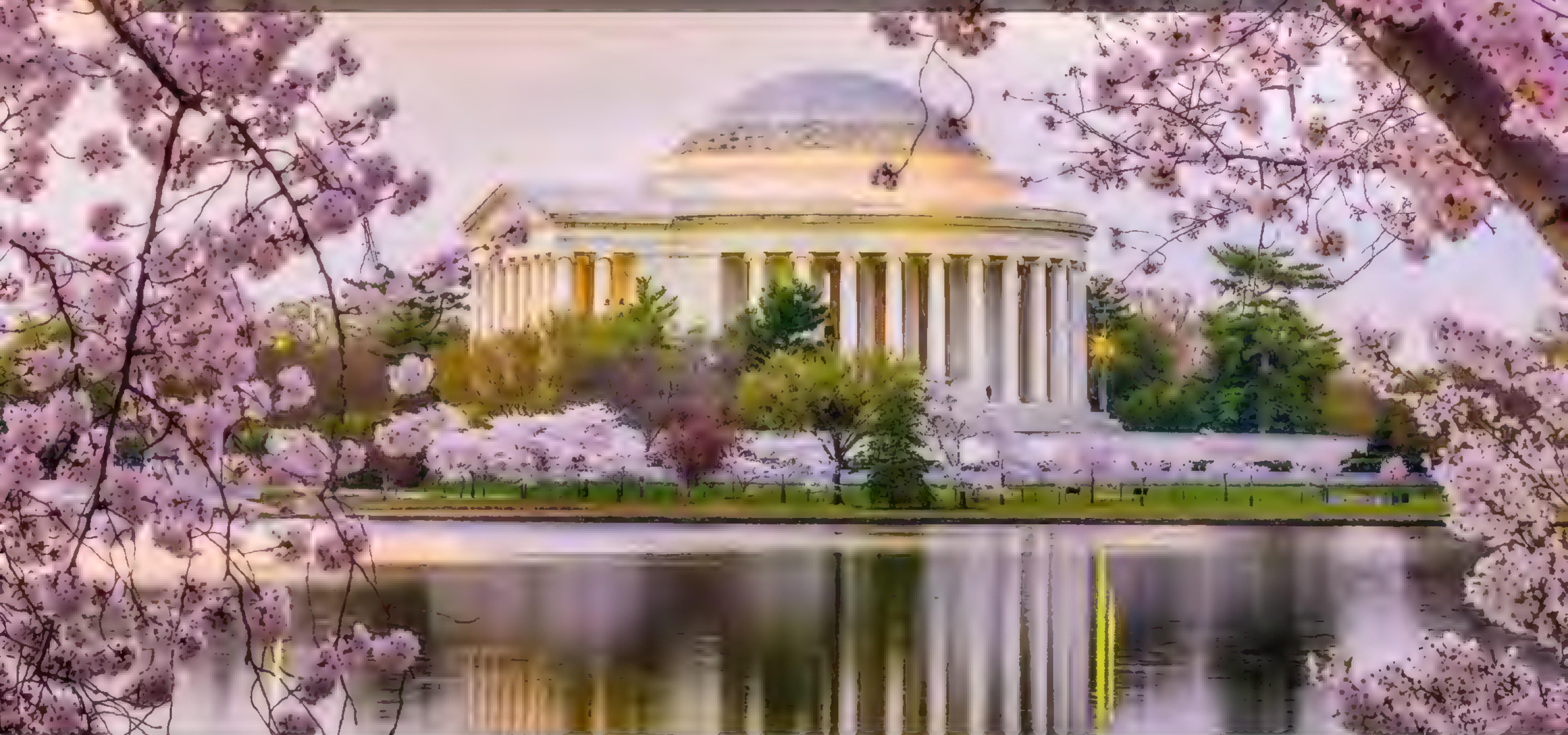




# WASHINGTON, DC

## A guide to the city's best events

There's never a bad time to explore the US capital, but ensure your visit coincides with one of these eclectic events to get a true taste of DC. Words: Connor McGovern



**H**ome to the corridors of power and a pantheon of white-marble monuments, the US capital packs some serious cultural punch, but that's only half of the story. Take a closer look and one of the country's most diverse cities reveals cosmopolitan neighbourhoods, which are home to vibrant arts, food and music scenes.

Just as eclectic is the city's calendar of events. Washington, DC is a destination for all seasons, but a visit during one of its lively celebrations is a brilliant way to discover its personality. Whether it's to learn more about Indigenous American heritage, get a flavour of local jazz or experience the beauty of cherry blossom season, there's a reason to visit all year long. Here are five unmissable dates for your diary this year.

### 1 NATIONAL CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL 20 MARCH TO 14 APRIL

The most-anticipated annual event in the city's calendar, the National Cherry Blossom Festival commemorates the donation of 3,000 cherry trees from the Mayor of Tokyo in 1912. Strolling along blossom-strewn avenues is an experience in itself, but there's a raft of events to enjoy, too. Ornate, Edo-style Japanese kites are just one of the displays of the Blossom Kite Festival (30 March), while Petalpalooza (6 April) is a day of family-friendly entertainment by the Anacostia River, finishing with a fireworks display. The Sakura Matsuri Street Festival (13-14 April), meanwhile, is the largest celebration of Japanese culture in the US, with everything from martial arts to taiko drumming.

### 2 PASSPORT DC 1 TO 31 MAY

Embassies throw open their doors for the Around the World Embassy Tour (6 May), where visitors can be hands-on with a variety of international cultures — from meeting alpacas at the Peruvian Embassy to karate lessons with the Japan Information and Culture Center. There's also EU Open House (11 May), a day full of tastings and live demonstrations celebrating European cultures.

Also not to be missed is Fiesta Asia! (20 May), where over a thousand exhibitors and performers representing 20 cultures gather for one of the country's biggest Asian heritage festivals. Running between 3rd and 6th Streets, the block will be abuzz with music, martial arts, a shopping bazaar, craft stalls and vendors serving Pan-Asian fare.



### 3 CAPITAL PRIDE 31 MAY TO 9 JUNE

More than half a million members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community will fill the streets this summer when Capital Pride returns to DC. Among the highlights are the Pride Block Party (8 June), during which 17th Street will be transformed by a raft of food trucks and vendors, and the Pride Parade, which will set off from 3pm on the same day in a colourful celebration of love, diversity and inclusion.

The free Pride Festival, meanwhile, will close this year's Pride on 9 June with a party on Pennsylvania Avenue. The full programme is still under wraps, but expect a whole day of advocacy, live music and entertainment across three stages, with plenty of food and drink to keep the party going. All eyes will be on DC in 2025, too, when the city will have the honour of hosting World Pride (23 May to 8 June).

### 4 DC JAZZFEST 1 AUGUST TO 31 SEPTEMBER

DC JazzFest sees venues across the city come alive with foot-tapping rhythms and blues tunes. As well as promoting plenty of homegrown talent, the festival draws big names from the jazz world, too — Grammy Award winners Gregory Porter and Kenny Garrett topped the bill in 2023, while this year's artists-in-residence include legendary bassist Ron Carter.

A programme of concerts, interviews and events will offer an eclectic taste of the genre, while the festival's headline event — the two-day JazzFest at The Wharf — kicks off on Labor Day weekend (31 August to 1 September). With its boutique shops and restaurants, this lively stretch along the Potomac River is a great spot for live music with the DC skyline as a backdrop.

### 5 RESTAURANT WEEK SUMMER & WINTER

As well as serving up some local classics — don't leave without trying a chilli half-smoke from Ben's Chili Bowl, a DC institution since 1958 — Washington's food scene is just as cosmopolitan as its people. Highlights include spicy Ethiopian chicken *doro* and *pupusa*, a dish that originated in El Salvador featuring flatbread stuffed with cheese and refried beans.

Held twice a year in summer and winter, Restaurant Week is the best time to tuck in: over 150 restaurants across the metropolitan area participate in the seven-day event, offering discounts for diners. Keep an eye out for restaurants offering wine and cocktail pairings, or splash out in one of 24 Michelin-starred restaurants to experience special menus.



Clockwise from left: The Jefferson Memorial among the blooms; VUE rooftop is one of the many bars which participate in Restaurant Week; DC's Capital Pride festival

#### PLAN YOUR TRIP

American Sky offers a three-day tour of Washington, DC, including flights and accommodation, from £999 per person. For more info, visit [americansky.co.uk](https://americansky.co.uk)





CITY LIFE

# SÃO PAULO

In Brazil's largest city — an ever-evolving metropolis of intertwined cultures — diasporas from across the globe use music, art and dance to make their mark

WORDS: ELLEN HIMELFARB. PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDRÉ KLOTZ

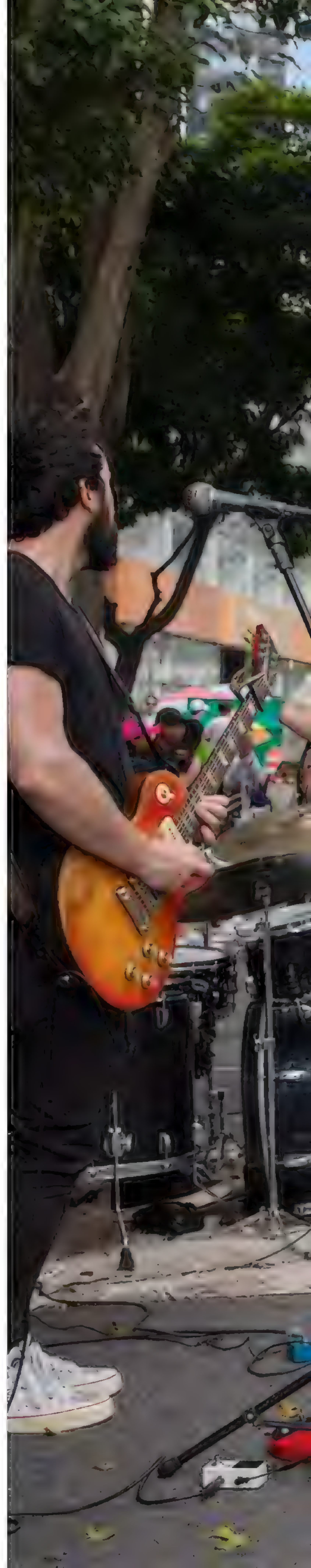
I'm still two blocks away when I hear the samba beat, subverted by a deep, assertive bass. At the far end of a pedestrian lane paved in white tiles, a Beaux Arts villa called Casa de Francisca glows red and purple from within. Its tall second-storey windows are flung open to reveal hundreds of party-goers. Behind the villa, there's São Paulo's historic centre, the silhouetted at night.

Once home to a musical instrument shop, then a radio broadcaster, before becoming an empty shell, the building now has more people inside than it's ever hosted before. When I enter, it feels as though they're testing the structural integrity of its Corinthian pillars. A fusion of black, white, mixed, Indigenous, macho and gender-fluid people, the crowd bounce and shout out lyrics, white shirts billowing, trilbies toppling. Their eyes are on the DJ booth where Angola-born writer-musician Kalaf Epalanga is spinning kizomba — a sweeping genre embracing Afrobeats, Portuguese pop, fervent hip-hop and plaintive soul. When Kalaf eases into a slower tempo, couples pair off in sweaty synchronicity, or make out under the tiered chandelier. Two tall mirrors on the stage reflect the scene back to me.

Emerging from Angolan clubs in southwestern Africa during the war-torn 1980s, kizomba culture has rippled through the Afro-Portuguese diaspora like waves across the Atlantic. It's difficult to define because it's considered an attitude — a matrix of Latin rhythms, new wave synthesisers and early techno, but also fashion bravado and survival spirit that's found a footing in São Paulo. The Afro-pop Cape Verdean crooner Djodje is kizomba; so, too, is the Rio-based Afrobeats DJ Joss Dee. The literal meaning of kizomba in the Kimbundu language, one of several spoken in Angola, is 'party'.

In this city of around 12 million — the world's largest Portuguese-speaking centre and Brazil's most populated city by a country mile — Kalaf has a huge fanbase. And this celebration of kizomba, held in partnership with Kalaf's fellow artist, friend and countryman Nástio Mosquito, is their way of testing the waters for a permanent Kizomba Design Museum in the city, with Casa de Francisca one possible home for it. The pair are clearly on to something.

After his set, we sit down together and Kalaf puts it to me like this: "The African diaspora













**Deep roots** Some 56% of Brazilians have African ancestry — nearly 115 million people. Before abolition in 1888, Brazil was home to nearly half the enslaved people in the New World

in the Western world take whatever jobs are available from the bottom of the pyramid,” he drawls. “They’re immigrants, invisible all week long. No one knows their story. But come Friday they’ll get their best outfits from the dry cleaner, call the barber, take pride in their presentation. That’s why we call it kizomba design.” Nástio, his afro wilder than Kalaf’s and prematurely grey, says it’s quite the opposite to fado, a Portuguese music genre of melancholic songs and rhythms that originated in the 19th century. “Fado was all longing and pain. Kizomba celebrates. It shows there’s a different way to live under stress. It says: ‘We have today, so let’s dance, let’s drink, let’s f\*\*k.’”

The following morning I see them both about 20 minutes away at Megafauna, a sunlit bookshop where they’re hosting a standing-room-only kizomba symposium. The books stacked to the ceiling represent a diverse range of authors that reflect São Paulo’s true mosaic. From the 16th century until 1888 — horrifyingly late for abolition — Brazil took in more enslaved people from Africa than any New World country. And, since the postwar industrial boom, many of their descendants have ended up in São Paulo. More than half of all Brazilians are Black or mixed race. Yet, they still largely live on the margins. “A lot of Brazilians are disconnected to their roots,” Nástio tells me, “but they’re gaining agency.”

Megafauna sits on the ground floor of the rambling Edifício Copan, a 38-storey S-shaped tower built in striking ribbed concrete by the late, great Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer in the 1960s. There’s an art gallery upstairs, a cafe next door chiselled out of a raw concrete shell, a vintage boutique and 1,160 apartments in the floors above. The

artists have chosen this landmark to lure their audience from the four corners of town. “It’s important that our culture can access places like this,” says Nástio.

This quarter of the historic centre has suffered its share of neglect. Though São Paulo’s crime rate is lower than that of more touristy Rio de Janeiro, Kalaf admits “this is not a city to play with”. He tells me to be vigilant, and to hide my phone in the streets from thieves on bikes. Still, he loves the kizomba vibe around Edifício Copan. “São Paulo doesn’t have the beautiful nature of Rio. It’s rough around the edges, so people only have each other and the culture to embrace.”

Kalaf isn’t just referring to Africans like himself but the whole spectrum of people taking over the pavement outside Edifício Copan. “The immigrant influence defines the fabric of the city. It quickly gives you a glimpse of what Brazil represents,” he says. “I have the same feeling in New York — this big Babylon with people from all over the world.”

## TOPICAL & TROPICAL

I see what he means over lunch at Z Deli, a leather-booth diner in a mid-century building near Edifício Copan. Z is run by one of the 20,000 Jewish families who sought asylum in São Paulo over the 20th century. A 10-minute walk away is the Jewish Museum, a former Byzantine-style synagogue opened in 2021 to exhibit Brazilian-Jewish artefacts. Similarly, Z’s menu showcases a distinct hybrid flavour that straddles continents. I order what I think is a pastrami sandwich. What I get is shredded meat and spring onions on a bed of fries with a dollop of mayo, a jar of hot sauce and a local Guaraná-brand ginger soda.

Brazilian and Jewish cultures would seem to have little in common besides fate.

Clockwise from top: The main hall of MASP, São Paulo Museum of Art; a vendor holding a caju fruit at Mercado Municipal de São Paulo, the city’s biggest public market; Oscar Freire street, a shopping hotspot  
Previous pages: A skater enjoying live music on Avenida Paulista





## INSIDER TIPS

You can eat for less than a fiver at one of São Paulo's ubiquitous *lanchonetes*, a cross between a diner and doughnut shop. Open day and night all over the city, they serve sandwiches, *feijoada* (black bean stew), pastries, fresh juices and coffee.

Paulistanos are cuckoo for country music — or at least the Latin-flavoured outback genre called *sertaneja*. They turn up to the Wild West-themed club of Villa Country in tassels and denim, looking for a good line dance. You can't miss the venue, on the road out of the Barra Funda neighbourhood. [villacountry.com.br](http://villacountry.com.br)

Notorious São Paulo graffiti artists Os Gêmeos (The Twins) have left their mark all over the city. Find their most epic mural on one wall of the Museum of Modern Art in Ibirapuera Park. [mam.org.br](http://mam.org.br)

And yet, simmering in São Paulo, they come together with fascinating synergy. Just east of downtown, past an awkwardly placed motorway, is Liberdade, spiritual home to hundreds of thousands of Japanese Paulistanos — the largest community off Japanese soil. I head there with Fernando Filet, a tall, tanned tour guide who leads me beneath red lampposts shaped like paper lanterns. Liberdade's tight knot of streets can't contain the crush of pedestrians buying Hello Kitty-themed *pasteles* (dumplings) and Amazonian-fish yakitori, so vendors spill out onto a viaduct.

Looking down at the traffic below, Fernando shares a description from the late Anthony Bourdain, who visited while filming his shows *No Reservations* and *The Layover*. "He said, 'São Paulo feels like LA threw up on New York'." Fernando quotes this to all his clients because Bourdain — who loved the city — had a point. You don't tend to hear bossa nova paeans about the criss-crossing highways and graffiti-scrawled streets sprawling out from Liberdade. They're functional but fun, smelling of Italian trattorias and Lebanese falafel huts. Then, as we approach broad, busy Avenida Paulista, they smarten up.

Flanked by audaciously designed brutalist towers, Avenida Paulista has a retro character and unconventional beauty that appeals to me. Fernando points out a cool 1970s building by

architect Paulo Mendes de la Rocha, which flares out over the pavement like a bellbottom. But I prefer the street's São Paulo Museum of Art, or MASP, a giant glass box hoisted in the air by stout concrete legs painted a shouty shade of red. When its architect Lina Bo Bardi immigrated to Brazil from Italy in the late 1940s, she imported Italian modernism and the notion of public gathering spaces. "She was a woman of the people," says Fernando. On the piazza, framed by MASP's red legs, the community spirit is palpable, filled with skateboarders toting boom boxes and families on promenade. Fernando urges me up to the vast glass gallery overhead, where paintings by globally renowned artists such as Modigliani and Picasso sit alongside emerging Brazilian ones, their works encased in glass and planted in concrete foundations. From here we can peer out of the glass walls and watch the late-afternoon sun meet the skyline.

I could spend a week basking in grand-gesture museums like MASP, but I've promised my new kizomba mates I'd check out the scene in Barra Funda, north of downtown. On a sunny morning I meander among its charming painted stucco terraces. There's an antique shop under a deep awning and a bakery festooned with azulejo tiles selling Portuguese custard tarts. An electric-green maritaca parrot wolf-whistles from the shoulder of an old man as I duck into HOA Galeria.

Clockwise from top left: The Beaux Arts Casa de Francisca villa plays host to live music and DJs; Angolan musician Paulo Flores performing kizomba at Casa de Francisca; a whisky sour at A Dama e os Vagabundos bar; night-time drinkers sitting outside the bar









### Q&A with architect Rubens Azevedo, founder of São João, a manufacturer of art installations for museums

#### HOW DO YOU GET AROUND A CITY LIKE SÃO PAULO?

Solely by bike. I work in the Barra Funda neighbourhood, which has become an art and design hotspot over the past decade. I live seven minutes south, in Vila Buarque, so I can ride home for a power nap before after-work drinks on Rua Sousa Lima. My favourite spot is A Dama e os Vagabundos. [instagram.com/adamaeosvagabundosbar](https://www.instagram.com/adamaeosvagabundosbar)

#### HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR WEEKENDS?

I'll go to the Minhocão, a viaduct that closes to traffic — it's become like an open city park on weekends. I've joined a sports club called Palmeiras, with an amazing indoor-outdoor pool complex, so I'll go there in the evening. For dinner, there's a Korean neighbourhood called Bom Retiro with hidden places for bibimbap and soju. At the Korean barbecue restaurant Ogame, you have to ring the bell to enter, and it's at the back of a garden. [instagram.com/ogamekoreanbarbecue](https://www.instagram.com/ogamekoreanbarbecue)

#### WHERE'S THE BEST PLACE FOR COFFEE IN SÃO PAULO?

I'd rather have 10am oysters and beer at Casa das Ostras in the Mercado Municipal. [acasadasostras.com.br](https://www.acasadasostras.com.br)

Brazil's first Black-owned art gallery, HOA is hell-bent on shifting the narrative of Latin American art from the colonial to the personal, experiential and revolutionary. Inside, it's somehow brighter than outside, all blazing brushstrokes and thrumming video. The same goes for Mendes Wood around the corner — a gallery where endless vaulted rooms grab you and keep you rapt with installations exploring Blackness and otherness, by brilliant artists finally getting a platform. In fact, there's a gallery every 500 metres — and judging by the cocktail of languages I overhear, visitors have come from everywhere to appreciate them.

Covid had an unexpected positive impact on this neighbourhood, once known for Korean immigrants and industry. Home life pivoted to the pavements and when the city opened up again, restaurants, bars and galleries moved into the area's once-empty warehouses. People took notice. Just off Rua Barra Funda, I watch the young, beautiful and tattooed file into Mescla, a cafe with communal tables and a

Bolivian chef experimenting with Cuban, Andean and Mediterranean cooking. In an area spoiled for wine bars, everyone lines their stomachs here.

That evening it's back to Casa de Francisca to watch rapper Dino D'Santiago, a Portuguese artist of Cape Verdean descent, fire up the crowd into absolute, arm-swinging rapture. I can't help but get up out of my vintage cinema seat. "We're rocking the place," Nástio says, when I can hear again. The crowd snaps into perfect sync for the Electric Slide line dance. They know every move, every word. Kalaf says that's not surprising. "All these people have the same cultural touchstones, and they don't experience their stars playing in town."

I ask him about those two big mirrors flanking the stage. He tells me that self reflection is part of the design emblematic of kizomba. "This culture is fragile," he says. "Our traditions are ephemeral, oral. Our story is nowhere, but when we look at ourselves and we look at each other, we can see it."







**Big worm** To increase public space in the city, every weekend officials block off a 2.2-mile stretch of elevated highway locals call the Minhocão, or ‘Big Worm’, where people stroll, dance and play

From left: A customer browsing at Megafauna bookshop; aerial view of the Minhocão elevated highway on a weekend, when it’s closed to cars and becomes a park

## 14 HOURS IN São Paulo

### 8AM

#### BREAKFAST AT MERCADO MUNICIPAL

At the domed Beaux Arts-style Mercado Municipal, kiosks open from 6am to hawk produce such as salt-cod, spices and deep-fried buns including the local meat-stuffed, teardrop-shaped *coxinhas*. Paulistanos elbow their way to Bar do Mané on the mezzanine for a *pingado*: espresso with just a drop of milk. Try the bar’s piping-hot cheese-filled pastel pastries, or the legendary sweet versions, oozing guava or fried caramelised banana. [mercadomunicipal.sp.com](http://mercadomunicipal.sp.com) [bardomane.com.br](http://bardomane.com.br)

### 9AM

#### ART IN THE PARK

Every street surrounding the market has a different retail theme: eyeglasses, shoes, electronics. When the area gets busy, head to Jardim da Luz, 20 minutes away on foot. Stroll amid the lush greenery before heading to the historic rose-brick Pinacoteca museum, which opens at 10am by the eastern gate. Clever roof lights and floating steel bridges were added by Brazilian architect Paulo Mendes de la Rocha in the 1990s. It spotlights contemporary stars such as Sonia Gomes — and a Picasso once stolen in a famous heist. [pinacoteca.org.br](http://pinacoteca.org.br)

### 12 NOON

#### WINDOW SHOPPING AT OSCAR FREIRE

From Luz Station, a homage to London’s Houses of Parliament, the Linha 4 Metro runs to Oscar Freire Station — the surrounding streets are a hub for the city’s swishest retail. Start at Pinga for conceptual Brazilian fashion by designers like Æo and Vanda Jacintho. Two streets over is Alameda Gabriel Monteiro da Silva, a road where it’s hard to distinguish between lavish minimalist residences and lavish minimalist boutiques — like Dpot, a low-slung villa showcasing Brazilian rosewood furniture. [pingastore.com.br](http://pingastore.com.br) [dpot.com.br](http://dpot.com.br)

### 2PM

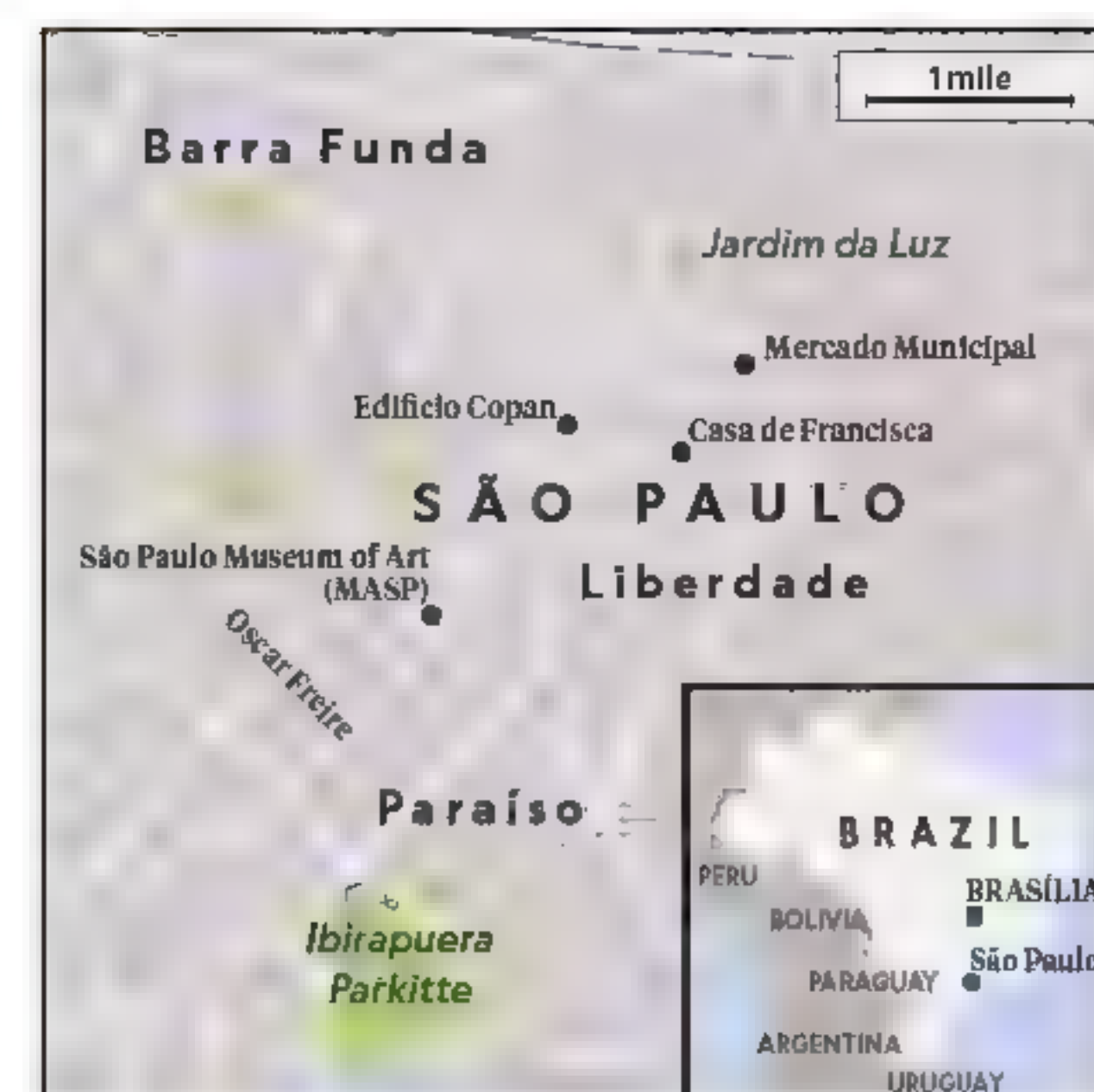
#### FLAVOURS OF THE AMAZON

Jiquitaia is a kind of pepper ground by Baniwa Indians in the Amazon. It’s sprinkled across the menu at eponymous restaurant Jiquitaia, in the Paraíso neighbourhood, and emerges memorably in cocktails such as the house bloody mary. Served in a homely dining room, the whole barbecued fish is best for sharing. It’s filleted at the table to preserve its crispy, spicy skin, and presented with cassava porridge and fragrant rice. The tangy okra and shrimp stew has a vegetarian alternative. [jiquitaia.com.br](http://jiquitaia.com.br)





Left: Sculptures at the Pinacoteca art museum in Jardim da Luz



#### GETTING THERE & AROUND

British Airways and LATAM fly direct from Heathrow to São Paulo several times a week. Virgin Atlantic is also launching direct flights from Heathrow to São Paulo in 2025. [ba.com](http://ba.com) [latamairlines.com](http://latamairlines.com) [virginatlantic.com](http://virginatlantic.com)

**Average flight time:** 11h5m.

São Paulo's neighbourhoods are easily explored on foot, though to get between them it's best to take the Metro — 5 BRL (80p) per journey, or it's around 30 BRL (£5) for the average Uber taxi fare. Be cautious walking around at night; don't wander alone and never take out your phone in public — pickpockets are rife. [metro.sp.gov.br](http://metro.sp.gov.br)

#### WHEN TO GO

The rainy season extends from October to March, when temperatures reach the 30Cs. From April to September, temperatures hover around the low-to-mid 20Cs with very little humidity. You'll likely be in a T-shirt by day, but bring a jacket as nights can get chilly at this time of year.

#### WHERE TO STAY

Rosewood São Paulo, in the Bela Vista neighbourhood. Doubles 3,350 BRL (£490), B&B. [rosewoodhotels.com](http://rosewoodhotels.com)  
Selina Aurora, República neighbourhood. Dorms from \$76 (£60), B&B. [selina.com](http://selina.com)

#### MORE INFO

[visitbrasil.com](http://visitbrasil.com)

*Lonely Planet Brazil*. £18.99

#### HOW TO DO IT

True Travel offers an 11-day itinerary of Brazil's coastal and inland culture, from £6,400 per person, including two nights at the Emiliano São Paulo hotel, private guides, all internal travel but excluding international flights. [true.travel](http://true.travel)

#### 4PM

##### LESSONS FROM THE SLAVE ERA

Across the other side of Paraíso is the impressive granite Monumento às Bandeiras. This was crafted by the legendary Italian-Brazilian sculptor Victor Brecheret to recognise the native Brazilians and enslaved people who toiled for Portuguese colonisers exploring Brazil's interior. The history lesson continues at Museu Afro Brasil, in Ibirapuera Park. The foyer is dedicated to museum founder Emanuel Araújo, also a noted sculptor famed for designing massive totems in pleated-steel. The artefacts upstairs include the partial reconstruction of a slave ship and modern paintings and sculpture from some of Brazil's 100 million African descendants. [museuafrobrasil.org.br](http://museuafrobrasil.org.br)

#### 5PM

##### ARCHITECTURE AT IBIRAPUERA PARK

Most buildings in Ibirapuera Park — Museu Afro Brasil included — were designed by Brazil's most illustrious architect, Oscar Niemeyer. The most photographed might be the organic dome of the 1951 Oca, an exhibition hall shaped like an ancient native Brazilian dwelling. But Niemeyer's pyramidal Auditório Ibirapuera deserves kudos. Spend some time admiring this structure, with its vermilion canopy that cantilevers over the entrance like a tongue, and the lashes of red swooping around the foyer. The auditorium seats a few hundred indoors, but the stage opens fully at the rear, to a vast lawn accommodating 15,000. [ibirapuera.org](http://ibirapuera.org)

#### 7PM

##### FUNK & CAIPIRINHAS AT ORFEU

At night, São Paulo's artiest residents spill out of República Metro to the cafes and bars flanking Avenida Ipiranga. Orfeu is the buzziest and most colourful. It can be found on a cordoned-off pedestrian alley plastered with groovy tilework — known as 'Portuguese pavement' and which originated in Lisbon in the 19th century. By evening, couples huddle over risotto balls and deep-fried diced tapioca on the second-storey balcony. Back outside, you can hear Arrocha funk, with its slow and gritty Reggaetón-like drums, blaring out of the open windows while revellers — all long hair, scant clothing and body ink — clink caipirinhas on the pavement. [facebook.com/orfeubr](http://facebook.com/orfeubr)

#### 10PM

##### ESTADÃO'S LATE-NIGHT MUNCHIES

Estadão is the place to go for a late-night snack in São Paulo. Born as a lunch counter for employees of the *Estadão* newspaper, it's years since the journal and its staff moved on but the cafe is more popular than ever. Part of the appeal is in the original tiled decor, accessorised with hanging salamis and citrus fruit — and that it remains reliably open 24/7. You're on to a winner with most of the menu, but nobody can deny the booze-absorbing power of the Tradicional — thick chunks of roast pork topped with fried cabbage on an old-fashioned Kaiser roll. Drizzle liberally with the house chilli oil. [estadaolanches.com.br](http://estadaolanches.com.br)



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## CITY LIFE

# GHENT

Youthful and rebellious, Ghent is stepping out of Bruges's shadow as a Belgian canal-side classic

WORDS: ANGELA LOCATELLI  
PHOTOGRAPHS: KEVIN FAINGNAERT

In the 16th century, Ghent lost it all on the wrong bet. Built around rivers and canals, it was Europe's second-largest urban centre, falling just behind Paris. When Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who ruled over Belgium, raised taxes to fund military action abroad, the city refused to pay out. They'd already given a fair share, locals argued, and surely Charles, who had been born in Ghent, wouldn't turn on his home. In response, he marched into the city with his army, stripping it of its finery and parading its leaders in their undershirts, nooses around their necks.

Today, you can find evidence of the city's illustrious past in its historical centre, home to a UNESCO-listed belfry and the Gravensteen, a stone fortress said to have been inspired by Crusader castles. And while its heyday is now behind it, Ghentians proudly tell the story of their fall from grace as proof of their rebellious streak.

This spirit survived, the sign of a place that's at ease with its identity: socially conscious and full of fresh ideas. Initiatives like Nucleo are repurposing empty spaces into artists' studios, and inviting the public to peer in once a year — in 2024, the open day is on 5 May. Meanwhile, chefs are experimenting with the earth's pantry, casting Ghent as a European vegetarian capital. This energy is partly due to it being Flanders' biggest university city: out of some 267,000 residents, over a quarter are students. This ensures a near endless supply of speciality-roast coffee in the Overpoort student district, and nightlife ranging from candle-lit wine bars to sweaty warehouses, reverberating with the kind of techno more often associated with Berlin.

The city was named 2024 European Youth Capital by the European Youth Forum — and it's no surprise. In April, it will celebrate the accolade as part of the biennial Ghent International Festival, which will feature opera as well as dancers on roller-skates. Events will continue throughout the year, with locals as young as 15 invited to contribute ideas. As for what they'll come up with, all bets are off.





## SEE & DO

**HISTORIC QUAYS:** If you've seen photos of Ghent before, chances are they're of the Graslei and Korenlei. Once the city's centre of trade, these quays remain a hub of activity, lined with cafe terraces and moorings for boat tours. They're the gateway to the historical centre, as well as the neighbourhoods of Patershol, a former working-class district turned culinary hotspot, and Prinsenhof, a residential area that was once home to royalty.

**THE ADORATION OF THE MYSTIC LAMB:** This altarpiece by the Van Eyck brothers is the most stolen artwork of all time — it was even robbed by Napoleon, and over the years, it's been forged and almost destroyed. It marked the transition from Middle Ages to Renaissance in Flemish art: admire its genre-defining details at St Bavo's Cathedral, where a VR tour leads visitors through its history. [sintbaafskathedraal.be](http://sintbaafskathedraal.be)

**STREET ART:** Ever since a historical centre passageway — now known as Graffiti Alley — was given over to street artists in the 1990s, murals have claimed Ghent like vines. Free to download, the 'Sorry, Not Sorry' map pinpoints some of the most famous. Pieces from homegrown talent include the rabbits by big-name ROA on Tempelhof and the foxes on Napoleon Destanbergstraat, which helped artist Kitsune make a name for herself.

**DOK NOORD:** In the city's northern reaches, an old factory complex has been turned into Dok Noord, one of Ghent's newest leisure and office developments. Its main draw is Hal 16, a food hall in a former brick warehouse. Try barbecued dishes or Italian specialities including mafaldine pasta with octopus ragu, then quench your thirst at Dok Brewing Company. There are 30 beers on tap, but Waar is Loca, a pale ale brewed on site, is a crowd favourite. [dokbrewingcompany.be](http://dokbrewingcompany.be)

**BIKE GHENT:** Cristophe De Smet takes you beyond the city's historical centre on two-wheeled tours of his hometown. Book a private ride to tailor the itinerary to your interests, whether you want to learn about *beguinages* (former religious communities for women) or Belgium's first worker housing complex, named Zebra Street, which is now a venue for contemporary installations and even a pop-up swimming pool in the summer. [bikeghent.be](http://bikeghent.be)

**MUSEUM OF INDUSTRY:** Belgium was the first country in mainland Europe where the Industrial Revolution took hold. Housed inside a former cotton mill, this museum traces Ghent's rise to textile powerhouse. The star of the collection is Belgium's first spinning mule, a machine created to speed up yarn production: local Lieven Bauwens smuggled its components out of the UK, as export of such machinery had been banned. [industriemuseum.be](http://industriemuseum.be)

## The three towers

For one of Ghent's best views, stand on St Michael's Bridge and turn towards the historical centre: the three towers of the Belfry, St Nicholas' Church and St Bavo's Cathedral will all fall in your line of sight

Clockwise from above: Street sculpture by Belgian artist Michaël Borremans; a boat tour on the Graslei; Dok Breweing Company inside Hal 16, in the Dok Noord development; the ginza cocktail at The Cobbler; The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb altarpiece in the historical centre's St Bavo's Cathedral  
Previous pages: View over the Graslei quay and St Michael's Bridge, with Ghent's three towers in the distance











Clockwise from right:  
The Cobbler cocktail  
bar at 1898 The Post  
hotel; macarons at  
pastry chef Joost Arij's  
The Bakery; vintage  
books on sale at Antiek-  
Depot; Confiserie  
Temmerman in  
Patershol; Knol & Kool,  
a vegan restaurant  
and minimarket



## EAT

£ **KNOL & KOOL:** The choice at this vegan cafe, a few steps from the belfry, ranges from vegetable lasagne with rocket pesto and almond parmesan to bánh mì overstuffed with tofu, pickled carrot and red cabbage. Check out the on-site vegan minimarket for hibiscus-flavoured beer, green leek miso paste and nut cheese made locally. [knolkool.com](http://knolkool.com)

££ **LEPELBLAD:** This modern restaurant in tranquil Onderbergen, near the historical centre, works with local farmers and small producers to celebrate the season's bounty. The menu might change depending on the day's supply, but expect dishes like chicory tarte tatin with onion cream and mustard salad or marinated beef with salsify, soy and herbs. Each comes with a recommended wine and beer pairing. [lepelblad.be](http://lepelblad.be)

£££ **OAK:** This one-Michelin-starred restaurant is celebrating its 10th anniversary with a refurbished look but has retained the minimalist, dark-toned decor that lets its menu shine. Brazilian chef Marcelo Ballardín's multi-course menus lean into his international background with creations such as mackerel with Philippine calamansi lime or sea bass with tucupi sauce, extracted from wild manioc root in the Amazon rainforest. [oakgent.be](http://oakgent.be)

## BUY

**HOME LINEN:** This boutique on the Korenlei has been crafting its own designs since the 19th century. A lavender scent permeates the space, which sells lace tablecloths decorated with red lobsters, retro night gowns and children's dresses embroidered with rosebuds. It's all reasonably priced, despite Belgian linen being renowned for its softness. [homelinen.eu](http://homelinen.eu)

**ANTIQUES:** Ghent has a seemingly endless assortment of vintage shops. Located opposite each other on central Baudelostraat, Antiek-Depot has overflowing shelves of curios, while Moca has ceilings hung with chairs and tambourines. For more precise perusing, Galerie St-John has a pedigree selection of cutlery, porcelains and Belgian paintings, all housed in a former baroque church. [antiek-depot.com](http://antiek-depot.com) [mocagent.be](http://mocagent.be) [st-john.be](http://st-john.be)

**SWEETS & CONDIMENTS:** While Belgium is known for waffles and chocolate, Gheintians will recommend different specialities. Cuberdons are nose-shaped hard candies filled with fruit syrup; get a packet at Patershol's Confiserie Temmerman, which dates to 1904. Even older is Tierenteyn-Verlent in the historical centre, selling a locally famous mustard made using a secret recipe. [temmermanconfiserie.com](http://temmermanconfiserie.com) [tierenteyn-verlent.be](http://tierenteyn-verlent.be)

## AFTER HOURS

**'T DREUPELKOT:** It's been over four decades since Paul Rysenaer opened this pint-sized pub a few steps from the Graslei, where barrels serve as high tables and wood cabinets display shot glasses. Head here to try *jenever*, a juniper-flavoured Belgian and Dutch spirit: there are some 200 varieties on the shelves, some distilled by Paul himself. [druppelkot.be](http://druppelkot.be)

**THE COBBLER:** Walk up a spiral staircase and into this low-lit cocktail bar within 1898 The Post hotel, one of the city's trendiest addresses. It's hard to say what's better: the location on the Graslei, overlooking gothic St Nicholas' Church, or its signature concoctions. Try the fruity pear sonata with vodka, Cointreau, cassis and pear, or the herbal downstairs harry, a mix of rum, cognac, vermouth, Chartreuse, maple syrup and sage. [1898thepost.com](http://1898thepost.com)

**JAZZ CLUBS:** A UNESCO Creative City of Music, Ghent has a special affinity with jazz. Every July, Gent Jazz takes over a former 13th-century hospital with performances by the likes of Gregory Porter and Norah Jones, but you'll find sessions to jam out to all year. Hot Club Gent, an intimate bar, and Missy Sippy, a self-styled 'modern juke joint', are good places to start in the historical centre. [gentjazz.com](http://gentjazz.com) [hotclub.gent](http://hotclub.gent) [missy-sippy.be](http://missy-sippy.be)





Left: Ganda Rooms and Suites



#### GETTING THERE & AROUND

Take the Eurostar from London St Pancras International to Brussels for an onward connection to Gent-Sint-Pieters. [eurostar.com](http://eurostar.com)  
**Average journey time:** 2h40m.  
 Alternatively, fly nonstop with Brussels Airlines from various UK airports including Manchester and Birmingham. [brusselsairlines.com](http://brusselsairlines.com)

**Average journey time:** 1h20m.  
 Ghent is a largely walkable city with a car-free city centre. It's also bike-friendly; many hotels offer bicycle rental. CityCard Ghent has perks including free or discounted access to attractions, one boat tour, bicycle rental for one day and unlimited use of trams and buses in the city centre. It can be purchased online to cover 48 hours (€42/£36) or 72 hours (€48/£41). [visit.gent.be](http://visit.gent.be)

Taxis cost €2.60 (£2.22) per km, with a €10 (£8.5) basic fare.

#### WHEN TO GO

Belgium has moderate temperatures year-round, much like the UK. Visit between April and September to experience the city's canal-side life at its best. Summer is also when event season is in full swing, including the city-wide Ghent Festival, which attracts over a million visitors with music, dance and theatre performances every July. Travellers who visit around Christmas will find market stalls plus seasonal decorations at the Gravensteen.

#### MORE INFO

[visit.gent.be](http://visit.gent.be)  
[ghenteyc.eu](http://ghenteyc.eu)

#### HOW TO DO IT

Osprey Holidays offers three nights at Pillows Grand Hotel Reylof from £534 per person, B&B, based on two sharing. Includes return standard class Eurostar tickets from London St Pancras International to Gent-Sint-Pieters via Brussels. [ospreyholidays.com](http://ospreyholidays.com)

#### LIKE A LOCAL

**PORTUS GANDA:** Ghent's name comes from *ganda*, Celtic for 'confluence'. The city was founded where the rivers Lys and Scheldt meet; when the Graslei and Korenlei get too busy, follow the canals to this very spot, now a tranquil marina. If visiting in warm months, detour to St Bavo's Abbey, where hornbeam bushes mark the outline of a long-lost church.

**THE BAKERY:** When pastry chef Joost Arijs set up a chocolate shop in SoGo — Ghent's shopping district — in 2011, it was quickly named Belgium's best by restaurant guide Gault & Millau. Opened down the road in 2023, his follow-up bakery was always going to draw in curious locals but, a year on, the morning queues show no sign of subsiding. Come early to have your pick of the crispiest croissants. [thebakery-joostarijs.be](http://thebakery-joostarijs.be)

**VEGGIE THURSDAYS:** In 2009, Ghent was the first city in the world to introduce a weekly meat-free day — an initiative that's since been replicated from Taipei to Los Angeles. Take part yourself at Boon, an airy, Scandi-chic vegetarian lunch bar opposite the Gravensteen. The seasonal soups, salads and slices of quiche will have you coming back for more no matter what day of the week it is. [boon.gent](http://boon.gent)

#### SLEEP

**£ GANDA ROOMS AND SUITES:** You'll be hard-pressed to find better value for money than this B&B, set in an 18th-century townhouse in the historical centre. The eight rooms retain original mantelpieces and wooden beams, and the owners worked with artisans to furnish them with bespoke beds and Belgian art. [gandaroomsandsuites.be](http://gandaroomsandsuites.be)

**££ PILLOWS GRAND HOTEL REYLOF:** True to its former life as a baronial residence, this four-star hotel dazzles at first sight with a sweeping staircase in its marbled, neoclassical lobby. Set in a separate building, the 157 rooms are a more pared-back affair, but with common areas including a library and a bijou spa in what was a carriage house — plus the Graslei a stone's throw away — there's more than enough to keep you busy. [pillowshotels.com](http://pillowshotels.com)

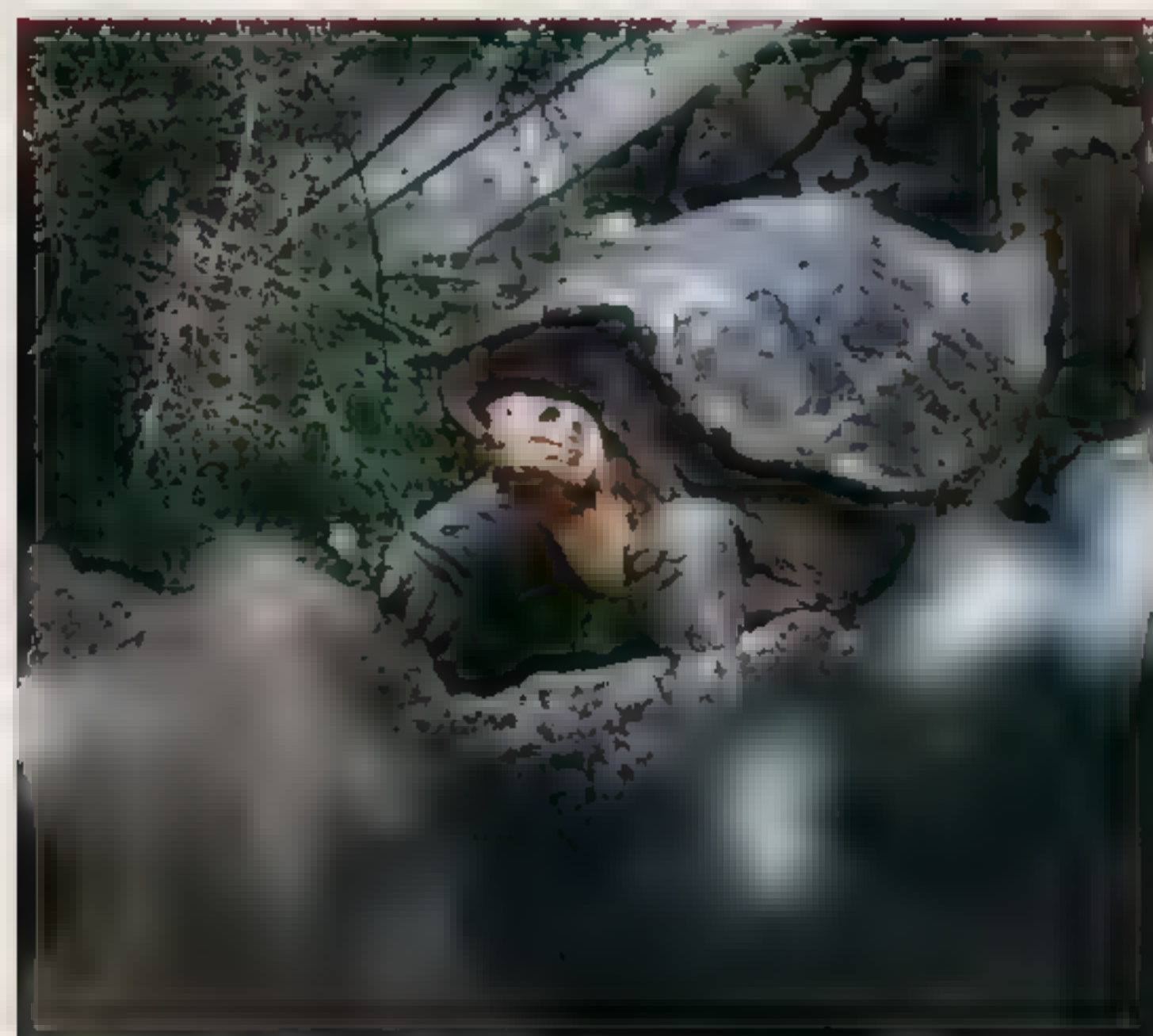
**£££ HOTEL VERHAEGEN:** Frescoes, a landscaped garden, a bath house with vaulted ceilings: there's nothing subtle about this city palace, a short walk from the historical centre. It was reimagined as a four-room guesthouse by a pair of interior designers, who combined hand-picked antiques with 21st-century touches. Splurge on the Suite des Annees '40 — though at some 750sq ft, the term 'suite' hardly does it justice. [theverhaegen.com](http://theverhaegen.com)



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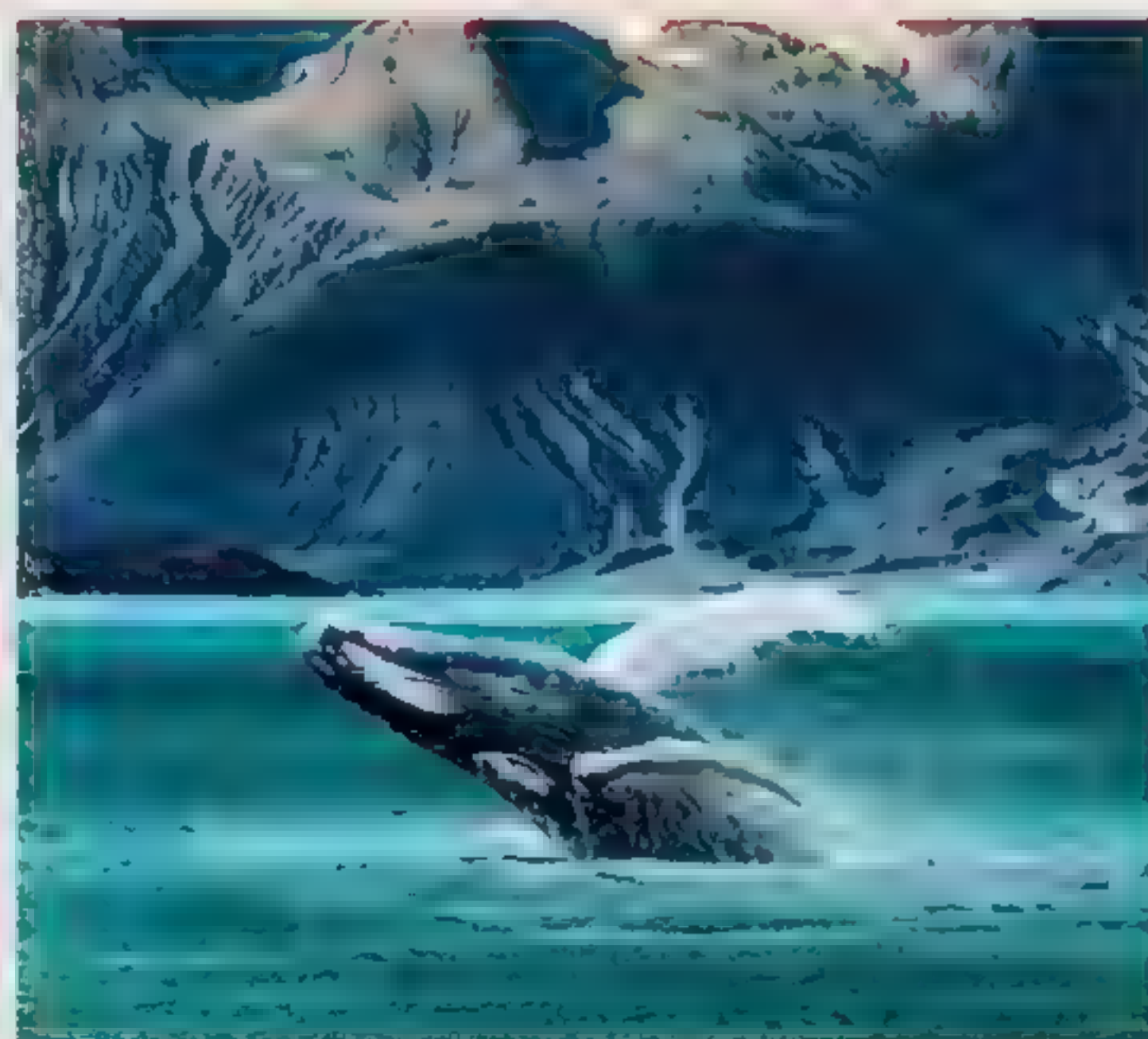
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EUROPE

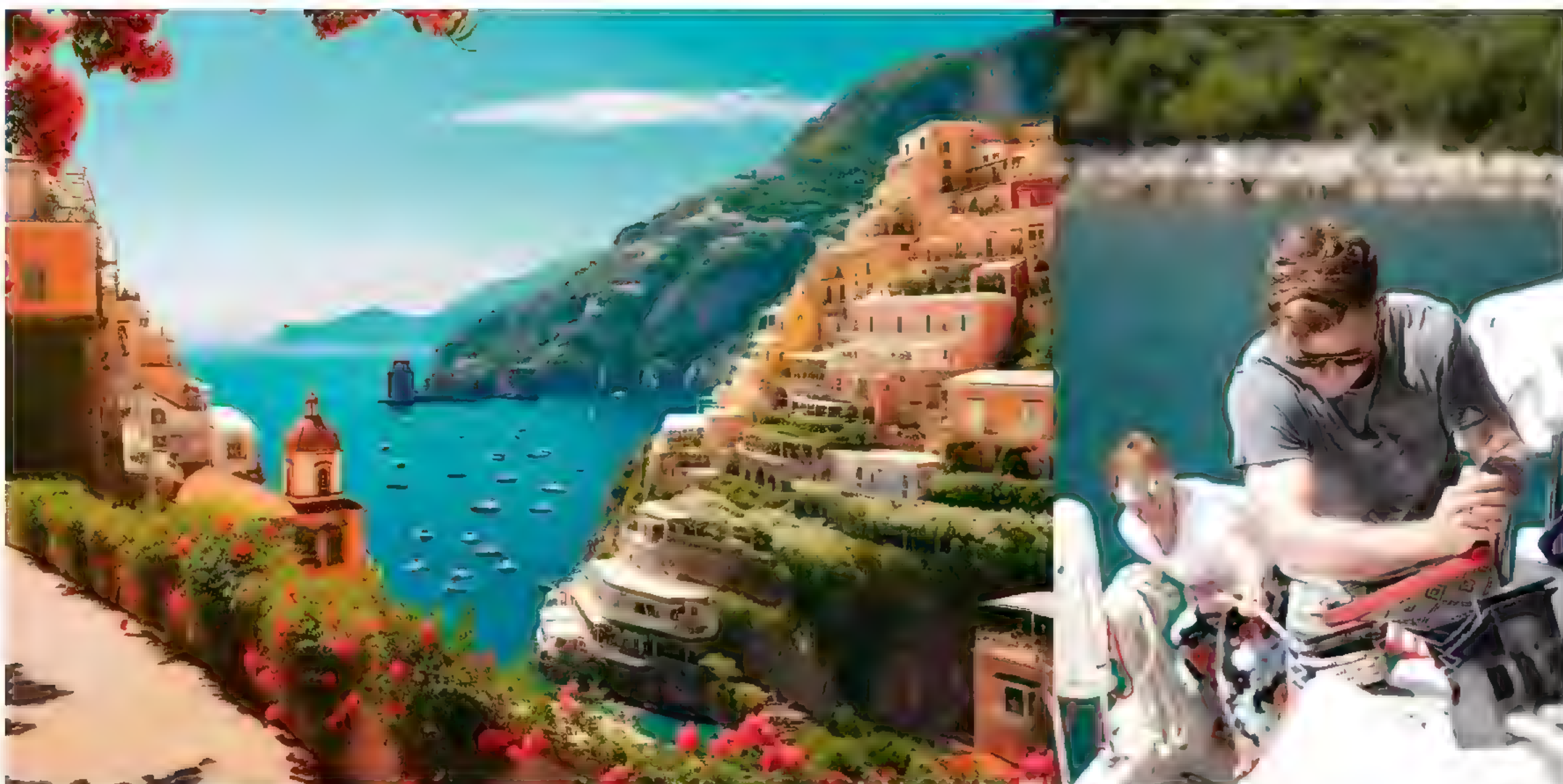
# Pushing the boat out

Explore the world from the deck of your own yacht with a skippered charter, bareboat or flotilla holiday. Words: Sam Lewis



The Ruza flotilla in Croatia  
From left: A pathway lined  
with flowers, Amalfi Lagoon;  
a flotilla sailing trip in Croatia





Craving a holiday with the freedom to escape the crowds and explore hidden coves, secluded bays and uninhabited islands? Looking to anchor somewhere to take a dip without another person in sight? Sailing enables you to access remote spots that are often inaccessible by land and to experience the diversity of a region, exploring islets, villages and marine parks in a single trip. Whether you're just starting out, or keen to set out with little ones in tow, these itineraries suit every type of sailor.

### 1 BEST FOR FAMILIES: CROATIA

The calm, clear waters of the Adriatic combined with favourable weather conditions in summer provide easy sailing for families and, with more than 1,000 islands dotted along the Dalmatian Coast, there's a range of activities and attractions with short hops to keep kids engaged. Set sail from the picturesque marina village of Agana and cruise gently to islands such as Brač, Šolta and Hvar, encouraging children to help out on board while keeping an eye out for passing dolphins. With their sheltered bays and clear waters, these islands are ideal stops for families. Spend an afternoon paddling in Brač's Bobovišća Bay, before setting sail for the remote islands of the Kornati Archipelago, a wild and beautiful national park known for its empty hiking trails. Sailing stops here can be educational, too, with a plethora of UNESCO World Heritage Sites and picturesque port towns steeped in history.

### 2 BEST FOR FOOD-LOVERS: ITALY

Why base yourself on land to sample Italy's incredible gastronomy when you can sail from region to region tasting the very best food and wine at numerous ports of call? Sunsail's SailEatalia's Italian Cuisine Procida Flotilla departs from the glamorous port town of Procida and sails to the Pontine Islands along the sun-soaked Amalfi Coast, offering stops to taste local cuisine, from classic dishes to regional delicacies as well as the country's finest wine. Sample Ischia's iconic stewed rabbit at an independent restaurant at the top of a mountain or try the Italian coastal delicacy alici da portare (pasta with anchovies, olives and capers) in the quaint fishing village of Cetara.

### 3 BEST FOR CULTURE VULTURES: CROATIA

A cultural treasure trove with 10 UNESCO World Heritage Sites from Roman fortresses to hilltop castles, Croatia is a mecca for sailors with a penchant for history. Start and finish a week's charter in Dubrovnik to explore one of the best-preserved medieval walled cities on Earth, touring citadels and Renaissance palaces, and be sure to include Lokrum, home to the ruins of a Benedictine monastery. Sail north and discover Mljet National Park and the island getaway of Korčula, thought to be the birthplace of explorer Marco Polo, where museums and restaurants line the cobbled streets and defensive walls of the town.

### 4 BEST FOR ISLAND-HOPPING: GREECE

With thousands of islands close together, sailing from one to another is a breeze, with remote white sand around every headland. Sailors are spoilt for choice, but the Ionian Islands, off the west coast of the mainland, are ideal for beginners with tranquil stretches of gin-clear water, light winds and warm temperatures. Sail to Ithaca or Kefalonia in the south or to Lefkas, Paxos, Antipaxos and Corfu. Tiny Antipaxos features just a scattering of houses, no proper roads and waterside tavernas where you can watch fishermen bring in the day's catch.

#### PLAN YOUR TRIP

Experienced sailors can opt for a bareboat charter for total freedom. Alternatively, if you are new to sailing, you can hire a professional skipper and learn the ropes as you go. You can also discover the perfect blend of freedom and security with a flotilla, where you leisurely follow a lead boat which includes a skipper, technician and host. For more information, contact [sunsail.co.uk](http://sunsail.co.uk) or T: 0330 332 1187.

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# ASK THE EXPERTS

NEED ADVICE FOR YOUR NEXT TRIP? ARE YOU AFTER RECOMMENDATIONS, TIPS AND GUIDANCE? OUR EXPERTS HAVE THE ANSWERS...

## THE EXPERTS



**Keith Drew**  
Freelance travel writer



**Angie Hills**  
Head of destinations,  
ABTA



**Georgia Stephens**  
Commissioning editor,  
*National Geographic Traveller* (UK)



**Caroline Mills**  
Freelance travel writer



Clockwise from above:  
Dondra Head lighthouse,  
east of Mirissa, Sri Lanka;  
the rococo façade of the  
Heilig-Geist-Spalkirche  
in Füssen, Germany; a  
Living Room Treehouse  
near Eryri (Snowdonia)  
National Park

**Where would you suggest for a two-week family getaway to Sri Lanka, blending culture and adventure?** A fortnight spent working your way to the south coast from the Cultural Triangle ticks all the right boxes for children. Start in the former heartland of the ancient Sinhalese civilisation. Built in the fifth century by King Kashyapa, the cliff-top citadel of Sigiriya is a steep climb up a winding wooden staircase, but doable for most kids. Their reward: epic views from the crumbling palace at the top. Equally unmissable is UNESCO-listed Polonnaruwa. At the entrance, rent a bike to explore the 12th-century garden city, its sacred pools and temples now colonised by macaques (Disney filmed the 2015 documentary *Monkey Kingdom* here). Bed down in one of Back of Beyond Pidurangala's

spacious treehouses, set in four acres of forest. From £100, B&B. [backofbeyond.lk](http://backofbeyond.lk)

Sixty miles to the south is Kandy, a lakeside town full of colonial-era buildings that makes a great base for exploring the cooler Hill Country. Whip up a curry in a cooking class, catch a Kandyan drumming show and join the locals in making offerings of flowers and rice at the Temple of the Tooth, so named as it houses what's said to be one of Buddha's teeth. Kandy is also the starting point for a Hill Country train ride through tea plantations to the cloud-forested town of Ella. Hilltop Ellerton, on Kandy's outskirts, has a pool and regular film nights. From £230 B&B. [kandycookingclasses.com](http://kandycookingclasses.com), [kandylakeclubdance.com](http://kandylakeclubdance.com), [ellertonsrilanka.com](http://ellertonsrilanka.com)

Finish up on the south coast's beautiful beaches – at their

best from December to April, when temperatures are high and rainfall is low. Most families head to the resorts in Unawatuna or Hambantota, but quieter Weligama is an attractive alternative, with palm-fringed sands. Treat the kids to a whale-watching trip from nearby Mirissa and spend a day in Galle exploring the city's wave-lashed ramparts. [whalewatchingclub.com](http://whalewatchingclub.com)

Dial into the vibe at surf and yoga lodge The Green Room, which, as well as offering surfing lessons, has rustic beachfront cabanas and family rooms. Sea-view rooms from £75 B&B. [thegreenroomssurfcamp.com](http://thegreenroomssurfcamp.com)

Sri Lankan-based Ayu in the Wild has a private 15-day tour for a family of four, including the Cultural Triangle, Kandy and Weligama. From £3,750 per person, excluding flights. [ayuinthewild.com](http://ayuinthewild.com) **KEITH DREW**



**After Japan’s recent earthquake, I’m nervous of booking a trip and getting caught up in a natural disaster. How can I protect myself?** One of the best things you can do is book a package holiday. In the event of a natural disaster, package customers can expect their tour operators to work with local authorities and the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) – often in partnership with travel associations like ABTA – to provide advice and

support. This may involve moving customers to areas unaffected by the disaster or repatriating them to the UK. When Rhodes experienced severe wildfires last summer, ABTA and its associated travel agencies worked closely with the Greek National Tourist Board, the local authorities and the FCDO to move thousands of British holidaymakers to safe parts of the island. While tour operators should provide compensation for medical bills or repatriation costs, the FCDO is not obliged to do so. Details

on the type of assistance that it may be able to provide is available at [gov.uk](https://gov.uk).  
Wherever you travel in the world, good-quality insurance is crucial. Independent travellers, who don’t get the same protection afforded to those on package holidays, should look for policies that offer cover for cancellation or curtailment due to a natural disaster. Some policies include this as standard, while others will charge this as an add-on, so read your policy carefully. [abta.com](https://abta.com) **ANGIE HILLS**



**My partner and I are planning to drive from London to Lake Garda this summer. Where should we stop along the way to break up the journey?** If you’re taking the scenic route, which follows the E42 motorway east from Calais through France and Belgium, you can reach as far as Luxembourg by the end of your first day. Make a pit stop in the village of Schengen here – tucked away half a mile from the E411. It gave its name to the Schengen Agreement (allowing free movement across borders within Europe) and stands at the meeting point of Luxembourg, France and Germany; within 20 minutes, you can walk through them all. Surrounded by vineyards, it’s also home to one of the best producers of Luxembourg wines, Caves Bernard Massard, so be sure to pick up a bottle of Château de Schengen during your stay. For a deeper insight into the area’s viticulture, pay a visit to the A Possen museum, where reconstructed period homes show how life was for 18th- and 19th-century wine-growing families.  
After fuelling up (Luxembourg’s fuel is the least expensive along the route), carry on south east to pine-fringed Füssen in Bavaria. A fine second stop, the pastel-shaded mountain township lies three miles from Neuschwanstein Castle, the 19th-century Alpine palace famed for inspiring Walt Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty* castle. You’ll see Zugspitze, Germany’s highest mountain, in the distance as you cross into Austria on national roads before joining the motorway at Innsbruck to traverse the Brenner Pass into Italy for the final stretch. [bernard-massard.lu](https://bernard-massard.lu) [musee-possen.lu](https://musee-possen.lu) **CAROLINE MILLS**

**I’d like to book a treehouse stay for two in the UK for spring, somewhere you can see bluebells. Where would you recommend?** Staying in a treehouse is a great way to watch the UK’s spring carpet of bluebells bloom, and the six Living Room treehouses are among the standout choices. Perched like owls between the oaks, larches and Scots pines eight miles north east of arty Machynlleth, they’re on the edge of Eryri (Snowdonia) National Park in Mid Wales.

Kept warm via wood-burning stoves, these off-grid boltholes are available year round, but are at their best when the forest floor turns cornflower blue in spring. Two nights from £379 for two. [living-room.co](https://living-room.co)  
Equally secluded is Brockloch Treehouse in Dumfries and Galloway. Dreamt up by architect Sam Booth, whose work has featured on Channel 4’s *George Clark’s Amazing Spaces*, the two stilted cabins have offset windows, letting light stream in at odd intervals

just as it does through a forest canopy. Two nights from £320 for two. [brockloch.co.uk](https://brockloch.co.uk)  
A more luxurious option is The Fold, in Herefordshire, within easy reach of the River Wye. It sits in forest planted with over 2,000 snowdrop, daffodil and bluebell bulbs. Spend the night stargazing from the copper bathtub on the deck, and wake up to the knocking of woodpeckers. From £220 for two. [canopyandstars.co.uk](https://canopyandstars.co.uk) **GEORGIA STEPHENS**





THE INFO

# Walpurgis Night

THIS GOTHIC SPRINGTIME FESTIVAL, KNOWN AS GERMANY'S 'SECOND HALLOWEEN', SEES REVELLERS UNITE TO WARD OFF WITCHES AND DEMONS THOUGHT TO GATHER ON 30 APRIL

## ORIGINS

A blend of pagan and Christian festivities, Walpurgis Night has been celebrated in Germany's Harz Mountains, and elsewhere in northern Europe and Scandinavia, for more than 1,000 years. Locals still don costumes, light bonfires and dance into the night



20

THE ESTIMATED NUMBER OF HARZ TOWNSHIPS THAT HOLD WALPURGIS NIGHT FESTIVITIES, FROM BAD GRUND IN THE WEST TO WERNIGERODE IN THE NORTH



58 miles

The length of the Harz Witches' Trail, which passes through UNESCO-listed Quedlinburg, timber-framed Goslar and Thale – home to The Witches Dance Floor, where one of the largest celebrations in the region takes place



1,142 m

THE HEIGHT OF MOUNT BROCKEN, THE TALLEST PEAK IN THE HARZ, WHERE WITCHES AND DEMONS ARE BELIEVED TO GATHER ANNUALLY ON 30 APRIL

## CASTING A SPELL



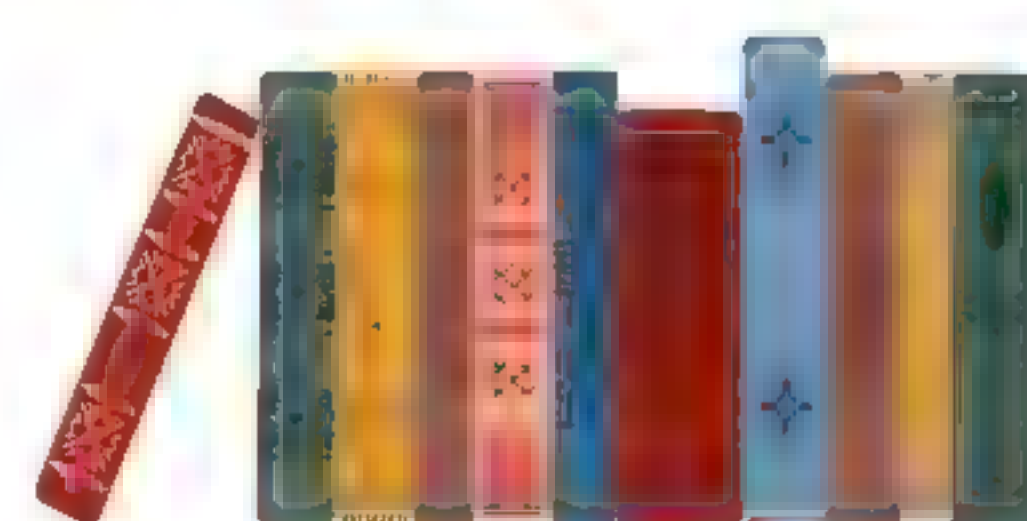
870 CE

Witch banisher Saint Walpurga is canonised on 1 May, giving her name to what some believe was originally a pagan celebration



1808

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe publishes the first part of *Faust*, in which the title character dances with witches on Mount Brocken



1835

Folklorist Jacob Grimm (of the Brothers Grimm) documents Walpurgis Night celebrations in *Deutsche Mythologie*



1935

Swiss-born German artist Paul Klee paints Walpurgis Night, a depiction of the dark revelries on Mount Brocken

Sources: [britannica.com](http://britannica.com) [gaimn.org](http://gaimn.org) [thefreelibrary.com](http://thefreelibrary.com)

WORDS: SAM KEMP. IMAGES: GETTY



## HOT TOPIC

# THE 100ML RULE

Air travel is about to get a little easier, with restrictions on liquids relaxed. With some airports struggling to adapt, here's what to expect this summer

For almost two decades, the queue for airport security has seen travellers hastily gulping down their bottled water and cramming liquid toiletries – limited to 100ml apiece – into a single transparent bag.

But not for much longer. In 2022, the government announced that by June 2024, all major UK airports would be required by law to install high-tech new security scanners. This would allow airline rules on liquids to be scrapped, among other benefits.

With the promise of speedier queues through departure, it was initially good news. But now, four of the biggest airports – Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Manchester – are on course to miss the deadline, prompting fears of confusion this summer.



New technology is expected to cut airport queuing times

## What's the 100ml rule? It

stipulates that passengers with hand luggage can only take liquids and creams in containers of up to 100ml on board an aircraft. These must be placed in a single, transparent, re-sealable plastic bag, which holds no more than a litre and measures about 20cm x 20cm. The bag must be able to close.

**Why was it introduced?** The measures were implemented after a foiled plot by Al-Qaeda in August 2006, during which terrorists attempted to disguise liquid explosives as drinks at Heathrow.

**Why is it changing?** The primary driver is an improvement in security technology. More advanced CT scanners mean that security staff are able to take a more detailed look at passengers' luggage. As well as negating the need to remove liquids and limit them to 100ml, the new machines mean electronics can stay in bags – without closer inspections – and prohibited items such as weapons and liquid explosives can be better detected.

According to Smiths Detection, which makes the scanners, this is thanks to explosives detection algorithms and automated object recognition software.

## Why is it taking so long?

Introducing the new machines is a huge financial burden for airports and poses a logistical challenge.

"It was always going to be a struggle for the big airports," a senior aviation source told *The Times*. "One of the biggest issues they face is fitting the new scanners and retraining staff without impacting the flow of passengers."

Heathrow, which has 146 security lanes across its terminals, faces the biggest challenge in meeting the deadline, and will have the smallest percentage of new lanes installed come June. A spokesman for Gatwick says it will have made "significant progress" by June but "plans to have completed the operation required to install the remaining scanners in Q1 2025".

Security areas will need to be adjusted at several airports because

of the size of the new scanners. The floors in some terminals, especially at Heathrow, need to be reinforced because of their added weight.

"The existing scanner is like a washing machine," says Nick Barton, chief executive of Birmingham Airport. "The new machines are the size of a Ford Transit."

**What impact are the scanners expected to have?** People failing to remove items from their bags or travelling with large bottles of liquids cause delays at airport security, as they result in additional checks. The new machines are expected to cut wait times dramatically, although the fear is that, in the short term, 'mixed messaging' will lead to delays – where airports still have both old and new technology, passengers won't know what to expect.

At London City, which has already completed the upgrade, the average time it takes to conduct security checks is now only three minutes and 45 seconds, down from seven minutes in 2022.

**What will happen this summer, and what's next?** Discussions are ongoing. Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Manchester are expected to be given an extension until 2025, meaning passengers at these airports will be told to follow existing rules – even though some lanes will have been upgraded – to avoid queues.

Other airports are understood to be on course, and passengers will benefit this summer. Along with London City, Teesside Airport has already scrapped the 100ml rule.

This forms part of a raft of new technologies being introduced over the next decade. Facial recognition and AI are playing a big role: in the future, passengers will board planes without showing documents – faces will be automatically matched to passports. Border Force has also started a process to see e-passport gates replaced with ones that do not require them to be inserted.

**BEN CLATWORTHY**

*Travel and transport correspondent at The Times*



## REPORT

# CAN VOLUNTOURISM REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

IT'S BECOME A £1.25BN INDUSTRY, AND PROFITS CAN BE VERY HIGH FOR UNSCRUPULOUS COMPANIES — SO HERE'S HOW TRAVELLERS CAN ENSURE THEIR TIME AND MONEY TRULY BENEFITS COMMUNITIES. WORDS: DUNCAN CRAIG

The fresh-faced school leaver, still in her teens, was as excited as she was apprehensive to be arriving in the east African village. Recruited to teach in the community school, the young Briton would be using her holiday to make, she hoped, a genuine impact. But she quickly found herself shunned by the villagers, who refused to engage with her teaching. After three distressing days, she packed up and left. Only later did it become apparent what had happened: to make space for this callow, enthusiastic and — most pertinently — free volunteer, the local teacher had been fired.

Tales such as this, relayed by an industry insider who helped handle the fallout and wanted to remain anonymous, may be mercifully rare. But, still, they serve as a reminder that, however well intentioned voluntourism may be at the point of inspiration, the reality on the ground is often much more nuanced. To subvert the popular supermarket slogan: every little doesn't necessarily help.

Voluntourism first emerged at scale in the 1990s, partly as a reaction to the ubiquity and, to some, vacuity of mass-market package tourism. Like an abridged version of a gap year placement, the practice sees travellers

augment or even supplant their getaway with some form of voluntary work in destination.

By 2019, it was a £1.25bn industry catering for an estimated 10 million volunteers a year — the majority under 25 or over 50. Today, the sector encompasses a dizzying breadth of options: volunteers can find themselves building houses in Honduras, teaching literacy to women in Morocco, protecting endangered brown bears in central Italy or delivering medical supplies to the Mongolian steppe on horseback.

The sector is sustained by conduits linking needy projects or communities with 'changemakers', as volunteers are sometimes called. Some of these are charities, non-profits or religious groups; others, traditional businesses servicing and capitalising on a healthy demand. To what extent specific skills are needed to fulfil a placement is a bone of contention. Enthusiasm and an adventurous spirit — combined with vetting, training and support — is more than sufficient, according to some organisations. Others, such as People and Places, see it differently.

"We don't think in terms of catering for the punters and the

countries they want to visit," says co-founder Sallie Grayson. "It's more, 'can we match someone to the skill gap that's been identified'." Established in 2005, the Kent-based not-for-profit social enterprise has placed 2,000 people over the past two decades. The modest scale is a source of pride for 68-year-old Grayson. "We make volunteers jump through huge hoops," she says. "Our numbers yo-yo depending on the skills we see coming through." Women make up the vast majority of its volunteers, roughly 75% — a picture mirrored across the sector.

### Force for good

Done diligently and ethically, voluntourism can have a transformational impact on both recipient and volunteer, says Alex Tarrant, co-founder of not-for-profit Pod Volunteer. The Cheltenham-based social enterprise, established in 2002, focuses predominantly on conservation and animal welfare; its volunteers might find themselves caring for rescued dogs in Thailand or working in elephant conservation in Namibia. "We made an early decision that we wanted to have a relatively small number of relationships, but ones we could

sustain," says Tarrant. "We visit all the projects personally and so can picture where we're sending volunteers."


Those who enrol are charged a fee for the placement to cover their overseas costs and the overheads of running Pod in the UK. Any surplus — something that profit-based organisations in the sector keep for themselves — is distributed via its charity to needy causes in the countries in which it operates. Pod, as is common in voluntourism, passes responsibility for international flights to the volunteers.

Exeter-based Global Vision International (GVI) is one of the bigger players in the market, having placed around 35,000 volunteers in more than 100 spots around the world over the past 25 years. One of the projects it's proudest of is a 20-year collaboration with the Seychelles government that's seen 1,000 participants contribute as interns, research fellows and apprentices in various marine conservation initiatives.

Longevity isn't always a marker of success, however. For People and Places, its most effective interventions are ones where skills transference is finely gauged and efficiently delivered, enabling





Kayakers on a wetland  
citizen-science field trip,  
collecting data to help  
develop conservation plans 





## ADVENTURES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

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A group of volunteers clearing rubbish from a beach in South Africa

ties to be swiftly cut. One example involved pairing a senior educator in the UK with a relatively new school principal in Cambodia. Extensive e-mentoring was followed by a four-week visit, after which both parties agreed that the volunteer's work was done. "How great is that?" enthuses Grayson.

Not all interactions are as mutually beneficial. In a sector where profit and philanthropy intersect, it's perhaps not surprising that ethics can be compromised. Few have studied voluntourism more closely than Xavier Font. The 51-year-old is professor of sustainability marketing at the University of Surrey, editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* and has worked as an adviser for companies such as Expedia and Tripadvisor. His frustration with parts of the sector is palpable.

If a company is devoid of ethics, voluntourism's profit margins can be "very, very high", he says. This is partly because

overheads aren't likely to be high, considering volunteers are usually put up in modest local accommodation, plus the fact that participants are typically happy to pay more for their trip because of how they can fund it. "While people's willingness to pay for a [traditional] holiday tends to be low, willingness to pay for a volunteering trip is greater because you can fundraise from family and friends," says Font.

Given the inherent power imbalance between an outbound operator — that's under no obligation to offer transparency on costs — and the often desperate partner project, unscrupulous companies can easily get away with hoarding profits rather than ensuring they percolate through to the destination.

### The skills gap

Across the voluntourism ecosystem, Font believes there's still too much focus on the needs of the volunteer rather

than the recipient, leading to inappropriately or under-skilled participants. "A key rule of thumb is: if you're not qualified to do something in the UK, don't pretend you can do it somewhere else simply because they're poor. If you're not qualified as a builder in the UK, don't pretend you can build a school in Rwanda," he says. And as for flying halfway across the world to muck in, forget it. "The one thing developing countries have plenty of is cheap labour."

Pippa Biddle, a New York-based writer whose book *Ours to Explore: Privilege, Power and the Paradox of Voluntourism* was published in 2021, recounts tales of locals in Tanzania spending all night rectifying the shoddy construction work of a team of volunteers on one of her many placements. Willing but underprepared volunteers endlessly duplicating predecessors' input is another concern. One voluntourism organisation coordinator was reported to have overheard an exasperated teacher say: "If one more volunteer comes in and teaches the children to sing 'head, shoulders, knees and toes', I'm going to scream."

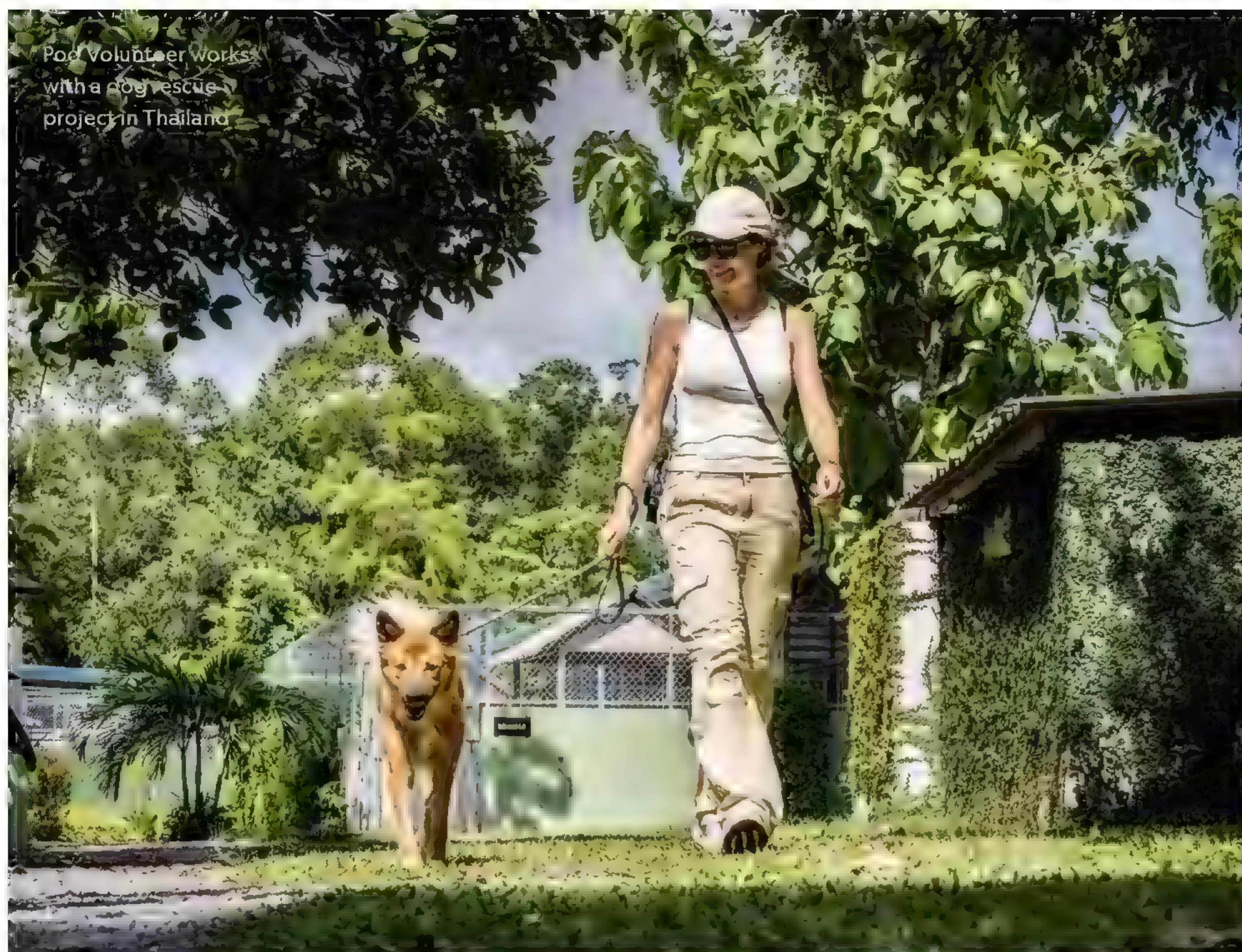
Font believes social media has exacerbated the sector's

problems, leading to an influx of volunteers with messianic delusions who are more interested in the shareability of images than affecting lasting change. But it could also be argued that it has had an unintended benefit: unscrupulous organisations can no longer thrive in the shadows, hiding behind a slick website and cut-and-paste testimonials. "Today, in a fully online and reviews-driven world, it's perfectly possible to tell the good from the bad," says Andrew Valentine, CEO of GVI. "As a result, I think that anybody who takes the trouble to fully research the organisation they're travelling with can be confident they're operating in a way that's actually ethical and for the good of the beneficiaries."

There's certainly a glut of advice and information out there. Would-be volunteers are urged to check reviews, speak to alumni and scrutinise an operator's code of ethics, such as GVI's 10 Ethical Commitments. Financial opacity is a red flag, as is anything associated with so-called 'orphanage tourism', a practice condemned for the grave harm it can cause, ranging from attachment disorders to human trafficking

"A key rule of thumb is: if you're not qualified to do something in the UK, don't pretend you can do it somewhere else simply because they're poor"





and sexual exploitation. ABTA, the Association of British Travel Agents, whose members include more than 3,900 travel brands, has long campaigned on the issue, while companies such as Responsible Travel and G Adventures provide comprehensive guidelines on any form of volunteering with vulnerable children.

Ken Budd's poignant and illuminating 2012 memoir, *The Voluntourist*, chronicles his travels around the world contributing to multiple projects. Asked how he avoided the pitfalls, the US author and journalist says simply: "Homework and asking loads of questions". He adds, "I was looking for organisations that wanted to know all about me. What were they doing to ensure I wasn't a psychopath? I'm screening you and you should be screening me — that was my take."

Such scrutiny is paramount given the dearth of regulation. "There's not much we have to comply with other than basic travel directives — those around package travel, for example," says Tarrant. "There's still very little regulation out there for companies like us. Mainly, it's down to volunteers checking that something's ethically run."

### The benefit equation

As for whether a meaningful contribution can really be made during these relatively brief philanthropic holidays, the answer appears to be an unequivocal 'it depends'. The nature and duration of the project are both factors, as are the individual's outlook and suitability. If the participant's experience inspires them to make further contributions, or perhaps pursue a career in a field such as marine conservation or animal welfare, the benefits can spread further still.

The environmental cost should also be factored into the equation. A Briton volunteering in the Seychelles will produce around 2.5 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> flying there and back. In holistic terms, that's quite the deficit even before a single seabird has been counted or branch of coral assessed. Tarrant, however, argues that's the wrong way to look at it. "When someone comes to me and tells me they're thinking about volunteering, they're often planning to travel anyway. If they can do something meaningful, that's a net gain." Extending a trip beyond the volunteering period, as many operators urge clients to do, can help to justify the emissions as well as provide a boost to the local economy.

For those for whom the equation still doesn't add up, there are alternatives. Domestic voluntourism is one option — perhaps working on a conservation or rewilding project in a scenic corner of a traveller's own country. E-volunteering through programmes such as the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) is also possible; skills currently sought by UNV include translators, website designers and communications specialists.

Yet, for someone whose wanderlust is as powerful as their altruistic urge, sitting behind a laptop is unlikely to cut it. It also, says Budd, negates one of the key collateral benefits of voluntourism: in-person interaction. "We wrap this around volunteering and service but, for me, the micro-level stuff is the biggest benefit," he says. "I'm talking to you, you're talking to me, and that's changing the way we see each other."

Even factoring in the flaws, voluntourism is overwhelmingly a force for good, concludes Sallie Grayson. "The vast majority of volunteers want to do good and it's up to us, the gatekeepers, to ensure that they can. Well-matched, well-placed volunteers can make a real difference, I'm still convinced of that." 

## IN BRIEF Six types of voluntourism

### ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Everything from assisting with beach clean-ups to citizen-science projects.

### ANIMAL WELFARE

Working to mitigate the impact of human developments, or contributing to projects overseeing the rehabilitation of neglected animals.

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Planning, building or maintaining infrastructure, developing business skills or working with the elderly.

### FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

One of the fastest-growing areas of voluntourism, focusing on the promotion of gender equality, upskilling and personal development.

### AGRICULTURAL

Harvesting, picking and packing, farm maintenance or assisting with the upkeep of animals.

### EDUCATION

Promoting literacy and numeracy, teaching English or coaching sports.

### MORE INFO

[travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk](http://travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk)  
[podvolunteer.org](http://podvolunteer.org)  
[gvi.co.uk](http://gvi.co.uk)  
[abta.com](http://abta.com)  
[responsibletravel.com](http://responsibletravel.com)  
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USA

# 10 reasons to visit the East Coast in 2024

Head to the USA's eastern seaboard and you'll find stylish cities, stunning natural shorelines and diverse cuisine, all celebrated through a packed calendar of events and openings this year. Words: Tamara Hinson







**F**or travellers seeking the best of the USA, the draw of the East Coast is undeniable. Whether it's taking in the iconic skylines of cities like New York and Philadelphia, indulging in the creative cuisine of Boston or the Carolinas, or exploring destinations that have played a crucial role in the nation's founding history, an East Coast adventure is hard to beat. But a visit here isn't just about the big-hitters. Look a little further and you'll find insightful exhibitions in Virginia and flower-filled celebrations in Pennsylvania, as well as a raft of new openings and seasonal festivals taking place throughout the East Coast this year.

### 1 FANTASTIC FOOD FESTIVALS

While headline-grabbing events like NYC Restaurant Week offer an opportunity to sample some of the East Coast's most famous cuisines, southern set-ups such as Miami's South Beach Wine & Food Festival are equally worthy of a spot on any food-focused itinerary. This four-day event — which features everything from cookery classes and tasting sessions to chef's table dinners and late-night parties — offers an ideal introduction to Miami's fast-growing food scene, which saw 12 restaurants in the city awarded a Michelin star in 2023. Notable openings include Pastis Miami — a brasserie-style restaurant run by James Beard Foundation Award winners Keith McNally and Stephen Starr — and Lucky Cat by Gordon Ramsay.

Further north, the summer months in Pittsburgh bring with them a true celebration of the diversity and dynamism of the East Coast's cuisine in the form of

annual events like the Pittsburgh Taco Festival and Pittsburgh VegFest. Most entertaining is July's Picklesburgh festival, when downtown Pittsburgh is transformed in a celebration of all things pickled. Highlights include pickle-themed cooking demonstrations, special dishes from local food vendors, musical performances and pickle-juice drinking competitions.

### 2 ILLUMINATING NEW EXHIBITIONS

In Washington, DC, the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA) reopened in October 2023 after a \$70m (£55.3m) renovation that breathed new life into its striking neoclassical building. The first museum in the world dedicated solely to championing women through the arts, the NMWA features more than 5,500 works by over 1,000 artists. The renovations have allowed for extended gallery space, additional research facilities and accessibility infrastructure for the collections, making for an increasingly insightful experience.

This year, you can also catch several temporary East Coast exhibitions that shine a light on lesser-known aspects of American culture. At Richmond's Library of Virginia, the Indigenous Perspectives exhibition runs until late August 2024 and offers insight into Virginia's tribal communities. Meanwhile, in Boston, a new exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts (home to 100 galleries) focuses on the ceramic works of Toshiko Takaezu, one of the 20th century's greatest abstract artists. Aiming to challenge traditional American abstract techniques, Toshiko Takaezu: Shaping Abstraction will run until late September 2024.

From left: Lummus Park in the morning, South Beach, Miami; sample some of the East Coast's best breakfasts during NYC Restaurant Week



### 3 ALTERNATIVE HISTORIC HOTSPOTS

The East Coast's cities offer a true journey into US history. Key stops include Boston, known as the 'City of Firsts', in part due to the presence of the world's first publicly supported free municipal library and the USA's first public park; Washington, DC, with its long list of historic monuments; and Philadelphia, whose Independence Hall is where Benjamin Franklin and others signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

There's also plenty to learn away from the well-known historical centres. For insight into the nation's nautical heritage, you can't beat Maryland's capital, Annapolis, home to the US Naval Academy. And while you may have heard of the Boston Tea Party, the Yorktown Tea Party in Virginia is equally enthralling. Most merchants here shunned British imports after the events in Boston in 1773. But when the *Virginia* sailed into Yorktown just under a year later, the boycott of British goods peaked, as locals who'd heard the ship was filled with British tea boarded the vessel and threw the goods into the river. In November 2024, several events will mark the Yorktown Tea Party's 250th anniversary.

### 4 SUMPTUOUS NEW STAYS

With a number of highly anticipated hotel openings in 2024, the East Coast will get a variety of new accommodation options with southern Florida, in particular, seeing serious investment. Wellness will be the focus at the EVEN Hotel Sweetwater — Doral, which opens in summer 2024 just outside Miami's city centre. In-room amenities can include Peloton bikes and yoga mats, and menus will be designed with health-conscious guests in mind. Equally opulent will be Hilton Singer Island Oceanfront/Palm Beaches Resort, which is set to emerge from a huge makeover in early 2024, part of a \$1bn (£790m) development programme in Palm Beach County. Expect refreshed rooms, innovative dining concepts and a beachfront bar.

The inaugural World's 50 Best Hotels awards of 2023 also featured two New York properties — the Equinox Hotel New York and the Aman New York. Visiting at the start of the year? NYC Hotel Week sees more than 100 hotels offer discounts of around 25% and is well worth considering for those looking for the most luxurious stay at the best price.

From left: Art deco hotels and palm trees on Ocean Drive, Miami; equestrian statue of George Washington in Boston Public Garden; Lexington Avenue and the Chrysler Building in New York City







## 5 THE BEAUTY OF THE BLOOMS

Green-fingered visitors keen to explore the natural beauty of the USA should make a beeline for Pennsylvania, where the annual Philadelphia Flower Show is the country's longest-running horticultural event. The 2024 edition, 'United by Flowers', will take place in March and aims to explore the ability of gardening to connect and inspire people and communities. Expect large-scale floral exhibits, expert-led educational sessions and a 'Flowers After Hours' party.

For year-round horticultural activity, head to Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania's Chester County, where you'll find 1,100 acres of intricate floral displays and woodland, and several vibrant, plant-filled conservatories. The gardens date back to 1921, and in autumn 2024, several new areas are set to be unveiled as part of 'Longwood Reimagined: A New Garden Experience'. Don't miss the new West Conservatory, with its islands of stunning Mediterranean-inspired gardens.

There are plenty of parks elsewhere on the East Coast, too. In Jacksonville, Florida, visitors can enjoy 400 publicly accessible green spaces — including the 46,000-acre Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. Even New York City, often known as the 'concrete jungle', has more than 1,700 parks.

## 6 RURAL ROAD TRIPS

New England continues to inspire road-trippers year round with a visit in the summer, spring or winter months quickly dispelling the widespread myth that autumn is the only time to visit the region. While routes such as New Hampshire's Kancamagus Highway are famous for their fall foliage, the area also offers historic covered bridges, thundering waterfalls and diverse forested landscapes, all of which make it one of the USA's top destinations for road trips. For the ultimate experience, make for Massachusetts and the coastline-hugging Route 127, where the most striking section (Route 127A) connects Rockport to Gloucester. You'll pass offshore lighthouses and the Gloucester Fisherman's Memorial, which honours the area's fishing heritage.

Alternatively, drive along Route 6A — also known as the Old King's Highway — where highlights include Cape Cod and Provincetown, famous for its quirky boutiques and laid-back atmosphere. It is worth spending at least three days exploring Cape Cod, settling into hotels such as the newly opened 30-room Greyfinch Chatham Inn, just a short walk from the beach. Its beautiful interior pays homage to the area's nautical history.





## 7 EDUCATION FOR ALL AGES, FROM SHARKS TO STAR WARS

For families, there's much to explore on the East Coast beyond Florida's famous theme parks. At Miami's Frost Science Museum, a spherical planetarium and two-million-litre aquarium are ever-popular stops, while the newest exhibition, *Sharks*, features life-sized shark models and tactile displays.

In Washington, DC, make for the National Museum of American History — where exhibits include Abraham Lincoln's iconic top hat — and the National Air and Space Museum, where ongoing renovation works saw eight new galleries open in 2022. Its exhibits range from Neil Armstrong's spacesuit to an X-wing starfighter used in *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*.

For hands-on entertainment, however, Philadelphia's Please Touch Museum simply can't be beaten. Its galleries are filled with interactivity — some dedicated to rockets and motor vehicles, while another features a full replica of a Philadelphia neighbourhood.

## 8 A PACKED CALENDAR OF CAPITAL EVENTS

Many of the East Coast's most popular annual events take place in the country's capital, Washington, DC. From 20 March to 14 April, the National Cherry Blossom Festival celebrates the city coming to life in sumptuous shades of pink. Washington, DC has the largest blooming of cherry trees outside Japan, and marks the occasion annually with an extensive programme of events, parades and performances celebrating Japanese culture.

In June, the city's Capital Pride Parade and Festival is one of the largest Pride events in the USA, while July will welcome the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Dating back to 1967, this two-week event celebrates cultural traditions and communities. This year's festival, *Indigenous Voices of the Americas: Celebrating the National Museum of the American Indian*, will highlight the traditions of Indigenous peoples with a focus on themes of relevance, resistance, representation and reclamation.

From Left: Looking across the Tidal Basin at the cherry blossom trees and Washington Monument, Washington, DC; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City





## 9 STATE-OF-THE-ART SPORTING EXPERIENCES

From the annual Formula One weekend in Miami — also a host city for the FIFA World Cup 2026 — to New York's US Open Tennis Championships, the cities of the East Coast are known for their world-class sporting events. But 2024 sees a number of additional openings for sports fans to consider. From April through June 2024, The Messi Experience, a multimedia tribute to the famed footballer, will be open at Miami's Hangar Coconut Grove. Expect high-tech interactive exhibits, skills games, extensive use of projection mapping and incredible 3D visuals.

Or for the ultimate fan experience, head to Orlando, where the Caribe Royale Orlando Resort opened its new Stadium Club in early 2024. This 500-seat sports bar will feature two huge 165-inch XHD projector displays, as well as screens that allow 360-degree immersion and interactive special effects. Snack on stadium-inspired cuisine and be sure to try one of the eight sports simulators.

## 10 ADRENALINE-INDUCING OPENINGS

Florida remains the state thrill-seekers typically flock to for an adventure on the East Coast. The most talked-about opening in the USA's theme park capital this year is the Evermore Orlando Resort, which opened its doors in January 2024 and features a 433-room Conrad Orlando hotel, two Jack Nicklaus-designed golf courses and a range of houses, apartments and villas.

It's also worth noting that in September 2023, the Brightline train opened its first Orlando extension, which makes it easier than ever to combine a holiday in the city with visits to Miami and Fort Lauderdale. In the parks themselves, new attractions at Universal Studios Florida include Villain-Con Minion Blast, a game featuring characters and backdrops from the *Despicable Me* and *Minions* films. Meanwhile at Tampa Bay's Busch Gardens, Phoenix Rising, a family-friendly suspended roller coaster, will open in spring 2024.

### PLAN YOUR TRIP

A number of airlines offer direct flights from airports across the UK to East Coast cities such as New York, Boston, Miami and Washington, DC. To travel between cities, it can be easier to hire a car, but train and bus routes also link most major hubs. For more information, go to [visittheusa.co.uk](https://visittheusa.co.uk)



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The first of these is the fact that the world is not a uniform place. It is a place of great diversity, with different cultures, languages, and customs. This diversity is one of its strengths, but it also presents challenges.



# IN THE NEXT ISSUE



Explore one of Latin America's brightest stars from north to south — hop between beaches in Baja California, ride the Chepe Express, cook with Indigenous chefs in Oaxaca, find art heritage in Mexico City and hike among ruins in the Yucatán Peninsula

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### Fresh talent

Head down to the star-studded Main Stage for live cooking demonstrations from Nadiya Hussain, Nisha Katona, Matt Tebbutt, Ravneet Gill, Richard Corrigan and more.

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Sit down with the authors behind some of the year's most talked-about cookery books, including Yui Miles, Su Scott, Dina Macki, Özlem Warren and Coinneach Macleod.

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## STAR LETTER

### Second time lucky

Due to the Covid pandemic, I had to cancel an adventure in Argentina. The excellent article about the country (Cover story, Jan/Feb 2024) caters for all needs and pursuits. As a foodie and wildlife enthusiast, the sections on birdwatching and culinary experiences in Buenos Aires motivated me to plan a new trip right away! I'll visit the Iberá Wetlands and finish with a stay in the capital. Thank you for planning my next dream trip. **NAIM HARIS**

## Ruby road

My partner and I travel extensively in Spain, but for our 40th wedding anniversary, we've been looking to plan a special trip. Reading the article on Amman (City Life, December 2023) has encouraged us to look into the experiences the country has to offer. A visit to Petra would be a must, and our love of Spain means we could then travel to Gumiel de Izán and compare its Church of Santa Maria to Jordan's ancient rock city. Thank you for the inspiration. **ANDREW DUCKER**

## Home from home

Congratulations on an excellent article on the virtues of campervanning around Oz (The Big Trip, Jan/Feb 2024). I'm in my late 50s and recently took early retirement, and my husband is in his early 60s. We bought our first motorhome two years ago, having only tried campervanning briefly during Covid, but we've never looked back. We love our regular trips and have seen lots of the UK's beautiful countryside, but now I feel ready to hire abroad. You made it easy and highly doable. I'll let you know when we're off! **JULIE WEAVING**





ST VINCENT & THE GRENADINES

# HOW I GOT THE SHOT

TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHER AND WRITER KAROLINA WIERCIGROCH ON CAPTURING THE VIBRANCY OF UNION ISLAND FOR OUR MARCH ISSUE



## Tell us about this image.

During my trip to the islands of St Vincent and the Grenadines, I was invited to watch a rehearsal at the Ashton Community Center on Union Island, where the Imani Cultural Organization seeks to preserve Ghanaian folk culture, highlighting the legacy of West Africans in the area. Here, group member Neola Laborde performs a traditional dance accompanied by drumming and singing in Swahili, a language now taught in Ghana.

## How did you achieve the shot?

I decided to shoot this with a full-frame Nikon D750 and my favourite Nikkor 50mm F1.4 prime lens. I used the first few shots to test the light, background and angles, and then spent some time observing the dancers and the patterns of their movement. I settled on a frame with a tall palm tree in the background, waited for one of the performers to arrive at that spot, and then shot a rapid series of images as Neola danced.

## What were the challenges?

The rehearsal took place around dusk, so I was losing light and had to keep raising my camera's ISO setting to make up for it. I wanted a crisp action shot, so I chose a fast shutter speed and set my aperture at F2.8, which was open enough to isolate my subject without blurring the drummers and singers in the background too much. By the time I took the photograph, the sun was very low, casting everything in a warm glow.

## What advice would you give to keen photographers who are planning on visiting St Vincent and the Grenadines?

Be aware, when planning shoots, that St Vincent's proximity to the equator means the sun rises and sets at a similar time all year round – around 6am and 6pm. Also, on clear days, the views over neighbouring islands are spectacular, so seek out vantage points like Petit Bateau in Tobago Cays, Mount Peggy Peak on Bequia or, if you're up for a volcano trek, La Soufrière, on St Vincent. And remember: always ask for permission before photographing people.

View the full shoot and interview online at [nationalgeographic.com/travel](https://nationalgeographic.com/travel)

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